

# FSTY 1313 Assignment 4: Research Paper

## (Worth 25% of your grade; due on November 10)

“Not just your [paper] but your research itself will be better if you ask at every point: *What will my most insightful readers be likely to ask at this point?* Still more important than anticipating those substantive questions, you have to imagine them asking these two rhetorical ones, *Why should I trust you?* and *So what? Why does this research matter?*”

— Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, authors of *The Craft of Research*.

### Overview

The research paper assignment is the most substantive project you will complete in this course, and you will spend the next eight weeks carefully developing a research plan, conducting both primary and secondary research, compiling an annotated bibliography, and—finally—writing the research paper itself. Because this assignment is so important, two other assignments that lead up to the research project (the research proposal and the annotated bibliography) have separate guidelines and will receive separate grades.

Based on your individual interests and guidance from me, you will:

- select a general question in the field of writing studies that is currently “unanswered,”
- develop a specific research question about a narrowed slice of that topic,
- prepare a realistic research plan,
- locate 5–8 authoritative or scholarly sources that illuminate your research question,
- conduct primary research designed to answer your question, and
- write a focused research paper that reports your findings and advances a specific argument.

### Assignment Details

To increase your chances of learning and succeeding, you will build up to the research paper by writing a few preliminary documents:

**Statement of Narrowed Topic (Due Tuesday, September 20).** This short statement (no more than a paragraph in length) will help you narrow a broad interest into a manageable research question. Before you come to class on Tuesday, September 20, view the list of broad research questions on the class website and select the one that interests you most. Briefly describe why you are interested in this topic and how you might refine this broad question into narrow topic that you can investigate on your own. Bring two copies of your paragraph to class on Tuesday. (If you are interested in multiple topics, you may submit two statements and ask for my opinion about which one is best suited to this assignment.)

**Research Proposal (Due Thursday, September 22).** Before you begin conducting research or finding published sources to support your argument, you will write a research proposal. This proposal will help you shape the project and will allow me to get a window into the early stages of your research. The overall purposes of the research proposal are to focus on what you are attempting to find out, to gather and evaluate research sources and other evidence, and to ask for my help early on. The research proposal is a highly structured document, for good reasons that I hope will become apparent. Please copy and paste

the research proposal, linked on the class website, and complete all sections of the document. I will read the proposal and give you feedback via email shortly after you submit it. Because this document will guide your work for Assignment #3 and Assignment #4, you cannot proceed with these projects until I have approved your research plan. Hence, it is in your best interest to submit a carefully written proposal on the first attempt.

**Annotated Bibliography (Due Thursday, October 20).** In addition to conducting primary research on your topic, you will also locate published sources, synthesize multiple sources, and integrate these sources into your own research paper. The annotated bibliography assignment is designed to help you accomplish these tasks successfully. For more information, please see the separate assignment sheet for the annotated bibliography.

Having successfully completed these preliminary assignments, you will be well positioned to write an engaging, original research paper. In the research paper, you will make and support your own well-grounded claims and try to push the conversation on your research question in the direction you contend it should go. A focused research paper builds a case for a substantive point. You are arguing for your point, which means you can't just demonstrate it or assert it; you have to advance claims and support the claims with evidence. In this case, your evidence will consist not only of what others have said about your topic, but also what you have discovered about your topic through primary research.

Because this is an argumentative research paper, you should not pretend to have no point of view. At the same time, you cannot simply base your argument on personal opinion or experience. You must deal fairly and scrupulously with sources and evidence, even when they support a position contrary to your own. Most of all, your paper needs to have a good answer to the often-unspoken question in your readers' minds: "So what?"

## **Advice for this Project**

As you write your research paper, keep the following ideas in mind:

- This is a project about inquiry (about finding out the answer to a question) rather than about gathering ammunition to support a preexisting opinion. There is an ocean of difference between the two tasks.
- Refining your broad interest into a narrowed slice of a huge topic is a major key to success in this—or any—real research project. This project will help you develop your skills in posing substantive, manageable questions.
- You will hone your ability to read sources actively and fairly, reading them as what they are: artifacts of human beings' efforts to persuade audiences within contexts, and not as mummified bricks of transcendent Truth. You will argue about and with your sources; you won't simply transport their words from books or articles into your paper.
- Substantive research projects and writing require you to be curious (students should be driven by a desire to find something out), tenacious (students need to be like detectives, following clues, digging in), and humble (students have to ask for help; nobody is born knowing how to do research).
- Remember that your focus might shift as you dig into your sources. That's OK. That's what inquiry involves. You can always change your plan, but only if you have one.

## Evaluation Criteria

I will evaluate your research paper using the following criteria:

- Does the document meet the minimum requirements for length and formatting? (Approximately 2,000 words, double-spaced, MLA formatting, abstract of 125 words, Works Cited page, etc.)
- Does the paper draw the reader in with an engaging, precise title, then lead the reader through the argument using clear, purposeful headings?
- How well does the paper's introduction work like the trailer for a movie? That is, how well does it promise a clear payoff for the reader's time and attention and give a roadmap to the rest of the paper?
- How successfully does the paper provide a focused yet comprehensive "conversation" on the writer's research question?
- Does the paper advance a clear, persuasive thesis, then support that thesis throughout the paper using logical claims?
- Does the paper use 5–8 substantive, authoritative sources? How fully and fairly does the paper deal with sources' arguments? Does the writer avoid simplistic hero/punching-bag dichotomies?
- Does the paper successfully integrate sources into the author's own ideas? Does the paper always make it crystal-clear whose words or ideas are whose? Does the paper use in-text citations every time the writer borrows ideas or information from another source?
- Does the paper show evidence of careful and ethical primary research? Does the paper explain the author's research methodology, present the findings of that research, and acknowledge the limitations of the research? Does the author draw connections between his or her primary research and the published sources cited in the paper?
- Does the paper adhere to the conventions of standard written English (i.e., spelling, punctuation, grammar)?