

UNIT 4: THE RESEARCH ESSAY(S)

CONTEXT: Research is extremely important in college writing. It is very rare that you will be asked to write something based solely on your own opinions; even in this class, you have had to rely on outside sources - sources written by other authors that you gathered - in order to make clear, effective arguments. The research unit will focus specifically on integrating the work of others into your writing. Incorporating research into your own work is a very useful skill that you will come across time and again both in academia, and the working world.

PURPOSE: Your purpose for unit four is to work on integrating outside research into your own writing, and practice making very strong arguments.

ASSIGNMENT: For this unit, you will write two essays. The first one, the preliminary essay, will be posted to the blog (eng101research.blogspot.com) so that the whole class can read it. The next step is to write a longer essay based on a prelim essay by one of your classmates. This will give you a chance to make your own argument from scratch in the prelim essay, as well as respond to an argument by another author. Engagement is key here; you want to be critical and you want to bring something new to the conversation that the first author has already begun.

SPECS:

Prelim Essay

- 1,100 words (about 3 pages typed)
- MLA format for citations
- sources listed at end of post, in MLA format
- 3 sources, 1 of which needs to be academic (journal article or book excerpt)

Response Essay

- 5 full pages, double spaced.
- MLA format for citations
- Works Cited
- 5 sources, 3 of which need to be academic (journal article or book excerpt)

WHAT NEEDS TO GO IN THESE ESSAYS?

The Prelim Essay: You will first pick a form of media that interests you, and then you will choose a topic or issue that is relevant to that media. You are making an argument about an issue that is represented through the media.

Example theses:

1. "African American characters in sitcoms tend to be marginalized and used solely for comic relief."
2. "Subtle yet destructive sex discrimination often occurs in the writing and directing of big budget movies."
3. "The use of online social networks does not damage or end relationships, but rather only provides another resource for jealous partners to observe and unfaithful partners to exploit."

The Response Essay

This essay must be written about the same topic or issue that one of your classmates chose for his or her prelim essay.

It may be an **expansion** of the argument, where you find more sources that support the original claim and you then work to make the original essay more complicated or nuanced.

Example:

- *Argument in prelim essay:* "Reality TV reinforces negative values."
- *Your expanded essay:* "Reality TV indeed reinforces negative values. Many shows feature candidates who physically fight in order to win a mediocre prize at the end. Other shows objectify women by making them compete for the title of one man's wife. Some poor values are reflected upon the family as well; a few shows feature parents with kids they can't control or the trading of mothers in order to teach a lesson."

In essence, you are adding more content to the original argument and making it more complicated.

The other option is to write a **counter** to the argument. If you disagree with the original claim, you will find sources to support your opinion, and you will present the other side of the story in a thoroughly researched and strongly argued manner.

Example:

- *Argument in prelim essay:* "Reality TV reinforces negative values."
- *Your counter essay:* "Reality TV in fact promotes many positive elements in American culture. It shows that strangers can be stuck together and ultimately become best friends. Sometimes reality TV rockets people to stardom and they suddenly hold interesting social positions. Other shows promote the positive effect that discipline can have on children or family pets, like dogs."

DUE DATES:

Prelim essay posted to blog no later than **Thursday, Nov 18th by 5:30 pm (beginning of class)**.

Response essay draft due for in-class socratic seminar **Thursday, Dec 2nd**.

Final response essay due on **Thursday, Dec 9th**.