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ENGL 102

Secs. 041, 061, 200, 220

17 September 2023

Research Essay (RE)

**Your task is to write a persuasive, argumentative essay with a counterargument about a debatable topic and to incorporate two (2) scholarly sources into your essay, which should be at least 2000 words.**

Subject matter

You may write about any topic for which there has been research except for any subject about literature. It may be helpful to research a topic within your major. If you do not choose a topic from your major, you should choose a topic for which you have some area of expertise because this assignment depends on evidence from your ideas as well as from the scholarly sources. When choosing a topic, consider the potential audience of who could care about your topic and would want to read your research essay. This potential audience should be broader than just academics. A useful strategy for research topics is to consider a policy that you want implemented at your university. What would you change and why? Your policy change could be limited to the curriculum of your major (requiring internships in the field in order to graduate) or it could affect the entire university (eliminating the use of student fees to fund collegiate sports).

Defining terms

It is crucial to define the subject(s) that you will research for this project. For example, if you are arguing for more gun control in the United States, you must explain what policies you have in mind. Defining your terms is important because your potential audience will not know whether they agree or disagree with your position until you define your terms. It is also good practice to define the terms in an essay because few researchable topics have just a single, agreed upon meaning. You should define the terms of your research in the first paragraph of the research essay.

What about the other side?

In your essay you *must* address at least one counterargument and show why the other side is wrong about your topic. Addressing opposing views is good scholarly practice as it makes your work seem unbiased. It is up to you where you address the opposition’s view, but your counterargument should be summarized in your thesis paragraph. Consider also who would be harmed if the opposition view “wins” the debate over your topic. The point of addressing counterarguments is that no argument benefits *all* parties involved. This means that there is no “right” position on any given issue, but it also means that some positions are more credible than others due to the evidence presented for that position. For example, the suggestion to ban plastic grocery bags in the US (which has happened in some cities) may benefit the environment but it also harms the producers of plastic grocery bags.

Participatory culture of the internet

Since the early 2000s the internet has emphasized user participation and the generation of original content on websites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and even Wikipedia. The idea of authorship has changed because sources tend to not be attributed on the internet. Users can now upload content of their own with no factchecking on the accuracy of the information contained in it.

Why scholarly sources matter

In an age where people can get thousands of YouTube views for their videos on the causes of the American Civil War (or any other topic) without citing any of the information contained within the video, internet users do not know what source can be trusted anymore. The lack of barriers to publishing anything on the internet in the age of Web 2.0 means that trusted sources of information must compete with amateur scholarship. Some fields, such as journalism, have undergone such a shift that what it means to participate in that field has completely changed. In fields such as these, it is freelancers who often break important news stories as opposed to journalists working for a newspaper or magazine or news agency. The ethos or zeitgeist of the internet today is “do it yourself” or DIY.

Features of scholarly vs non-scholarly sources

The following table simplifies some differences between academic and non-academic genres of writing.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TYPE | ACCESS | LOCATION | BASIS | LITERATURE REVIEW | PEER REVIEW | WRITTEN BY | SPEED OF PUBLICATION  |
| Scholarly | Pay | Online, Print | Argument | Yes | Yes | Academics | Slow |
| Non-scholarly | Usually free | Online, Print | Opinion | No | No | Journalists, Bloggers, Academics | Fast |

Finding scholarly sources

The best website for finding scholarly sources is the ULL library website @ <https://library.louisiana.edu/> . In addition to having access to library books, your status as a ULL student means that you can access online subscriptions to scholarly journals through this website (remember to login to your Ulink account).

The library databases site is located @ <https://library.louisiana.edu/node/145> . This page lists databases by academic field. A database in this context is a website that archives academic journal articles and sometimes scans of entire books. Databases are always searchable. In some cases, a database will be categorized under more than one academic field on the ULL library website because that database archives journals from more than one discipline. JSTOR, for example, is a database site housed under the “Literature” and “Psychology” categories of ULL’s website (to name just a few).

Another website useful for research is Google Scholar @ <https://scholar.google.com/> . This website acts as a giant database of journal articles from various disciplines.

What is important to remember about doing online research is that access is sometimes limited. In some cases, Google Scholar or the library website will show a description of the article but not the full article because it is not available for free online (on Google Scholar) or because ULL does not subscribe to the journal containing the article (on the library website). This means that you may need to spend more time researching that you think.

Please do not use Google to find scholarly sources. Google’s search engine does not distinguish between scholarly or non-scholarly sources, meaning that it is often the most popular search results that show up first, not the most credible or the most useful.

Analyzing a scholarly journal article

Technically a scholarly source includes a range of genres like a monograph (a book on a single subject), an edited collection of essays (or an anthology which can be by one or many authors), and a dissertation (a research based argumentative work presented to a university as part of getting an advanced degree in an academic field).

Pragmatically you will likely have to rely on scholarly journal articles for two reasons. First, they are shorter than monographs and dissertations (but about the same length as individual essays in an anthology). Second, they are easier to find online as compared to these other genres.

The following table explains some of the main parts of an article in a scholarly journal:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PART | DESCRIPTION |
| Abstract  | * short description and summary of the article which is always at the beginning
* often shows up in the search results of an online database
 |
| Thesis/Argument | * usually found in the abstract and usually repeated in the conclusion
 |
| Literature review | * a summary of what has already been said by others about the subject of the article
* usually contains a lot of citations and parentheticals
 |
| Methodology | * describes the plan for how the writer did the research
* includes the ways that the writer collected data from texts or people or other sources of information
 |
| Conclusion/Discussion | * writer considers what should be done next in resolving the issue they wrote about
* writer usually calls for further research on their topic to continue the conversation
 |

Unfortunately, not all articles actually label each of these categories, but most articles contain at least these parts, regardless of the subject matter.

Probably the most useful of these parts for this assignment is the abstract. The abstract will usually tell you the author’s position on an issue and briefly will describe why they take that position based on the research they did in order to write the article.

Reading the abstract of an article will let you know whether the article is worth reading or not. Note that the literature review, while tedious to read, will always include references to existing scholarly sources on a similar topic. Thus if you read the literature review you could easily find a second source for your research essay.

Subject matter/Topic

You choose the topic of your essay. You can choose to review a topic that you discussed in your narrative essay but your approach in this assignment must be different because you are not relying completely on personal experience as evidence for your argument.

Your topic should be debatable, it should discuss an issue that is a problem that can potentially be solved. It may be helpful to think of your subject matter or topic as a rhetorical situation with an exigence, audience, and constraints.

Argue first and research later

You should first develop an argument by taking a position on an issue and providing reasons for that position before finding scholarly sources. The reason for this is that it will decrease the chance that your essay ends up relying too much on the scholarly sources.

The sources you choose should support your position, oppose your position, or complicate the issue you are writing about. The sources should discuss the same issue as the one you are writing about.

However, your argument cannot rely entirely on your sources. You should include evidence from your own life and experiences in addition to textual evidence from your scholarly sources.

How to use non-scholarly sources

While your textual evidence should come from scholarly sources, it is sometimes helpful to use non-scholarly sources to find scholarly sources. When you find an article on your topic in a newspaper or magazine (whether online or in print) that article will likely either refer to an existing study that is likely a scholarly source. Alternatively, the non-scholarly article may refer to an expert on your topic, who inevitably must have written a book or research article about that topic, which would count as scholarly sources.

Formatting

Your essays should be in 12 pt. type and double spaced and should be in MLA format. Your final draft should be at least 2000 words (7-8 full pages double spaced). Your name should appear on the first page and in the header of every page along with the page number. Please include a Works Cited section at the end of your essay (it does not need to be on a separate piece of paper) if you include outside sources.

Remember to consult the Purdue OWL website for how to cite scholarly sources in MLA format @ <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. This assignment requires the quoting and or paraphrasing of scholarly sources in text, as well as in the works cited section.

Please upload your draft to the discussion forum for the assignment on Moodle as well as provide draft feedback for two of your peers. Please submit your assignments digitally via Moodle.

Due Dates

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| SECTION | ROUGH DRAFT | FINAL DRAFT |
| 041 | 23 October 2023 | 30 October 2023 |
| 061 | 23 October 2023 | 30 October 2023 |
| 200 | 24 October 2023 | 31 October 2023 |
| 220 | 24 October 2023 | 31 October 2023 |