

Exploratory Research Narrative with Field Research and Annotated Bibliography

Deadlines:

Monday, February 2: Rough draft for conferences (1000 words and at least three sources)

Monday, February 9: Preliminary field research due for discussion

Wednesday, February 18: Full draft peer review (2000 words and six sources)

Monday, February 23: Final draft (2000 words and six sources)

Length: Minimum 2000 words

Value: Exploratory Research Narrative (15% of final grade) + Field Research (10% of final grade) + Annotated Bibliography (5%)

GOAL: Your goal this semester is to identify a problem that affects you and then explore that problem through a variety of research methods, hopefully coming to a conclusion on how to solve that problem. Your first major project in the class asks you to narrate your research process as you choose a topic, generate a research question and conduct research. In this project, you are telling the story of your research process.

To complete this project, you'll have to read a variety of different sources, conduct your own interviews and/or surveys, and make connections between all of your findings. In the university and the workplace, there's typically no one source that tells you everything you need to know about a subject, so making connections between sources is an important skill. You are essentially becoming an expert on a subject, which means becoming a knowledgeable participant in an ongoing conversation about it. Becoming an expert also entails "wallowing in complexity"—postponing judgment about the best answer to a question so that you can consider all of the relevant information and arguments. Good academic writers learn to dwell on the difficult and problematic elements of their subjects instead of rushing to conclusions.

ASSIGNMENT: First, you'll choose a problematic issue that personally affects you or really interests you. This doesn't have to be a huge, worldwide problem, but it should be something public that affects enough people that you'll be able to research it thoroughly through a variety of sources. This problematic issue in need of a solution should also be something that perplexes you (i.e., something that you don't already have a solution for). It could be something from your field of study, a contemporary social issue, a personal problem that many people face, or something that affects a community to which you belong. You'll be working on this issue throughout the entire semester, so keep that in mind when choosing your topic.

Once you have a topic in mind, you'll come up with a research question (or questions). There's a good chance that your research question(s) will evolve as you do your research, and that's fine.

Revising your research question(s) shows flexibility, and it's also a good sign that your understanding of your topic is growing and evolving as you learn more.

As you conduct your research, you'll write an open-form, first-person, step-by-step narrative of your research process. The purpose of this essay isn't to persuade anyone of your point of view (save that for the final paper), but to bring your reader along with you through your research process as you try to understand different points of on your research question(s). You are basically writing a story about your research process and explaining what you are learning as you go.

SOURCE REQUIREMENTS:

Secondary Sources: Your paper must cite at least five secondary sources, but you'll probably look at many more as you develop your viewpoint on your topic. Three of these sources must be available through the FIU Library's online resources or physical holdings. You can look at Wikipedia and things that come up on Google, but you'll need to back those sometimes-unreliable sources up with more reliable ones from the library. Finally, make sure that your paper considers multiple perspectives or points of view on your issue. The goal here is to form your own clear understanding of your topic by making connections between all of your different sources.

Field Research (Primary Sources): During your research process, you will also conduct primary research such as interviews or surveys. **Your final draft must incorporate at least one primary source**, but it will probably be a good idea to make use of more than one as you attempt to learn about your topic. **WHEN CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS OR SURVEYS, TELL YOUR INTERVIEWEES THAT THEIR WORDS MAY BE USED IN YOUR PROJECT AND READ BY YOUR CLASSMATES. IF YOU INTERVIEW MINORS, MAKE SURE TO OBTAIN PARENTAL CONSENT.** The final draft of your exploratory essay must include detailed explanations of how you collected your information ("methods"), what you learned from the field research ("results"), and your own analysis of those results ("discussion"). You don't have to create separate subheadings for each of these, however.

In addition to submitting a final draft of your exploratory essay, you will also be required to submit a separate document that contains your field research observation notes, interview questions and responses, and/or survey questions and results, depending on the type(s) of field research that you conducted.

Annotated Bibliography: See handout on Blackboard for detailed expectations of this writing project.

TO ENCOURAGE ORIGINAL THINKING AND THOROUGH RESEARCH, YOU MAY NOT USE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING NINE TOPICS:

1. Abortion
2. Religious beliefs
3. Assisted suicide/euthanasia
4. Gay marriage or adoption
5. Capital punishment
6. Changing the legal drinking age
7. Legalization of marijuana
8. Conspiracy theories
9. Legalization of prostitution

GRADING CRITERIA: In grading this essay, I'll be asking the following questions:

- Have you walled in complexity, postponing judgment on your topic until you've looked at all of its difficulties? Does your paper describe how you've considered multiple perspectives on your topic?
- Is your research wide-ranging and comprehensive? Do you have at least four sources from the FIU Library and at least three sources from elsewhere?
- Does the essay include at least one primary source based on your own field research, along with thorough explanation and analysis of those findings?
- Have you summarized your sources clearly and fairly?
- Does your reaction to your sources include reflection on their rhetorical features and their place in the debate you're exploring?
- Does your introduction explain your interest in the topic and prepare your reader for the narrative of your research?
- Does your conclusion provide a clear explanation of the ways your thinking has changed about your topic?
- Is the essay easy to read? Is it free of typos and grammatical errors? Have you cited your sources correctly, both in the text and in a works cited page?

FORMAT: Prepare drafts according to MLA formatting standards (for examples, see the MLA-formatted sample paper at the end of the Everyday Writer's "MLA Documentation" section) or a formatting convention of your choosing. Be sure to cite all eight sources, both in the body of your essay and in a works cited page. Make sure that you include the page number and your name on every page. All drafts should be typed, double-spaced, and submitted to Turnitin.com. Your works cited page does not count toward the word count.