Essay Assignments Guidelines
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- General guidelines

Your general objective for essay assignments in this class is to present a position (or explanation or interpretation) and to convey supporting facts and arguments in a clear, precise and logical manner. Assume that your audience is interested in learning about the topic (rather than simply about your opinion about the topic), but has no previous knowledge of it. You should write as though your piece would be read and made use of by people who are satisfying their curiosity, and NOT just as though it will be read by me for the purpose of assigning a grade.

Of course, it is possible to convey information or argue for or against a position in a variety of ways. In professional situations, for example, your audience will demand a factual, objective formal style, while in other cases, such as the popular press, you will have to couch your information in an entertaining and more informal form. Each style would be inappropriate in the other's setting. Therefore, although there is not one "correct style" of writing overall, there are standards once we know the particular context. For each assignment, I'll let you know what the context will be and you should adjust your style accordingly.

Note, however, that there are some standards that are applicable in all contexts. Grammatical and spelling errors will distract from the content of any written material, so avoiding them is a minimal requirement for writing of any sort. This is not "nit-picking", for in the real world readers will in fact dismiss the author and the author's point of view as stupid or untrustworthy if this basic level of care has not been taken. Of course, any paper that is written to convey information must be clearly organized, with technical terms defined and new concepts explained.

- Length

In most instances when you do any written work in professional contexts you will have to stay within rather strict constraints on length. Submissions to professional journals, magazines & newspapers are all limited by total word number (e.g. the journal Isis of the History of Science Society requires that articles be 8000 words or less). If you write grant proposals to try to get funding for some project, you will be required to state the various aspects of your plan in the precise format required by the foundation to which you are applying. Your proposal will likely not even be sent to referees if you go over the stated length or don’t follow the instructions in other ways. In business you will often be called upon to write reports or recommendations that may not exceed 5 or 10 pages. Even in cases where writers are allowed to go on indefinitely (governmental agencies sometimes publish position papers that run for hundreds of pages) you will usually have...
to write an introductory summary that will provide the major elements of your argument. This will likely be the only thing that people will have the time (or desire) to read. So, it will have to be written clearly and persuasively for you to achieve your desired objective.

For this course we will simulate such constraints by restricting the paper length and by occasionally requiring that a specific structure be followed. If a paper is to be between 10 and 12 pages long you will lose points for turning in one shorter than 10 pages or longer than 12 pages. (See checklist below for standard formatting instructions). I will provide specific requirements when I assign each assignment.

- Format and Style

Every journal, periodical, company, agency, etc. will have its own preferred stylistic formatting constraints. Some periodicals, for example, do not allow footnotes, while others require them. And those that do will often follow different formats for the way in which references must be cited (e.g., A.P.A. bibliographic style).

For paper in this course you need not use any particular format for your bibliography (unless I specify one for a particular paper, as an exercise), but whatever you use you must then be consistent throughout. Naturally, you must give citations for all important information and for all quotes. These may occur parenthetically within the body of your text, or as footnotes, or as endnotes. You must do this for this paper even if you choose to write in a non-academic style.

Below I provide a checklist of some basic formatting standards that hold for almost all circumstances.
- Format Checklist

- Title: Give a meaningful title that expresses the content of your paper (NOT “Research Paper”)
- Do include your name in the upper right of the header on every page. [Note that you would not include your name in this way for submissions to journals or for grant applications that will be reviewed anonymously. In such cases, your name should just occur on a title page that the editors can remove.]
- Font size: 12 pt. [Note: Some grant proposals may allow you to go down to 11 pt. font size because of page constraints, but you are safer to stick with 12 pt. unless explicitly specified otherwise.]
- Font typeface: Use a standard typeface, such as you’d find in a newspaper (e.g. Times New Roman, which is what this is printed in, is accepted by any publication).
- Margins: maximum 1 1/4 inches on all sides; minimum 3/4 inches. Usually just go with 1 inch.
- Indent the first line of each paragraph half an inch.
- Use double-space throughout, except block quotations (which should be single-spaced, indented 1 inch from left margin and not indented from right margin). Don’t use the one-and-a-half space format that some word-processors have as a possible setting.
- Don’t insert an extra blank line between paragraphs (that is only used between single-spaced paragraphs, as in the paragraphs of these guidelines).
- Do include page numbers (either in the upper right corner of the header, or centered or flush right in the footer).
- Print your paper single-sided.
- Staple your paper together at the upper left corner. Don’t use those plastic or paper cover-sheets they sell in the bookstore. They make it hard for me to write comments in the margins and waste money you could better spend on movies and music. [Note that for some professional submissions you are supposed to use a paperclip rather than a staple, to facilitate editing and possible photocopying.]
- Always keep a back-up copy!

- Basic Grammar

  Don't use no double negatives.
  Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
  When dangling, watch your participles.
  Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
  Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
  About those sentence fragments.
  Try to not ever split infinitives.
  It is important to use apostrophe's correctly.
  Always read what you have written to see you any words out.
  Correct spelling is esential.

  - Harold Evans. Editor of London's SUNDAY TIMES.