Essay #4: Research Paper Assignment Sheet

Learning to write a quality research paper is one of the most important skills you can acquire as a college student. Your research-based writing provides you with an opportunity to participate in an intellectual discussion on a topic of immediate interest to you.

For this assignment, I will ask you to stay from away from the typical research paper topics like Birth Control, the legalization of marijuana, Gun Control, Abortion, the Death Penalty. Instead, I would like you to explore topics that represent you and your life – either your academic interests or your personal interests. We will explore topic ideas in class and in Discussion Board.

This essay should showcase your talents as a writer. Much of the work you will be doing independently, and I will simply be your guide. Plenty of class time will be allotted for work on this paper.

Please note that the assignments I have devised represent one process for completing a research paper. Obviously, teachers and researchers follow many different steps as they gather and synthesize source material for a research project; it is my hope that the process I ask you to follow is logical and useful to you.

Due Dates and Points Available:

**Component 1 – Three Weekly Topic Submissions** (worth 3 points)
Discussion Board postings are due on July 6, July 9, and July 13, 2009.

**Component 2 – Library Tour** (worth 2 points)
Complete and submit the answer form for the on-line English 112 Library Tour by Monday, July 8, 2009.

**Component 3 - Proposal Form** (worth 6 points)
Polished proposal with five attached annotated sources due July 16, 2009.

**Component 4 - Annotated Bibliography** (worth 6 points)
Submit an Annotated Bibliography of 10 sources (which includes the five completed above) relating directly to your selected topic by Monday, July 20, 2009.

**Component 5 - Synthesis Chart** (worth 6 points)
Submit a complete synthesis chart which tracks all sources, their relationships, and interpretations by Tuesday, July 21, 2009.
Component 6 – Rough Draft
Submit a complete rough draft with in-text citations and a Works Cited page by Monday, July 22, 2009.

Component 7 - Final Draft (worth 17 points)
Submit a fully documented, researched, synthesized, and well-argued essay of 8-10 pages, using MLA documentation style and strategies by Monday, November 28, 2009.

- REVISION POLICY - Any research paper that does not pass may be revised once for no higher than a "C." Revised research papers will be due on Tuesday, August 3, 2009.

Requirements:
- Minimum synthesis of 7 sources—one must be a book and at least 4 must come from the library research databases.
- Your thesis must be argumentative and your sources must be synthesized to support your thesis.
- You should choose the most appropriate argumentative format for your paper – evaluation, proposal, speculation of causes, position essay.
- Minimum 8-10 pages in length.

Topics: Choose from one of the subcategories below and write a fully synthesized, completely researched argumentative essay.

1. Browse through the reading chapters of Perspectives on Contemporary Issues. Identify a current “hot” issue that springs from any of the chapters. Research the issue and write an argumentative essay. You will find suggestions for research at the end of each chapter of Perspectives.

2. Look through one or more newspapers, watch the nightly national news, or use some other news-source. Choose an issue that is currently being discussed in the media, is controversial, and is worthy of more of your attention.

3. Think about issues within your major. Find out what types of research you will be doing in your upper-level classes and begin investigating now.

4. Review all the postings in Discussion Board to get ideas for your own topics.

Note: The research paper assignments will overlap other assignments during the course of the semester. It is important that you carefully follow the syllabus so that you do not get behind!!
Research Paper Component #3 – The Topic Proposal

1. Describe the topic that you have selected for your research paper and explain what you hope to learn from conducting your research. Keep in mind as you write that your paper must be argumentative rather than strictly informative.

2. Explain what your sources are telling you about the topic. What are the connections that you are finding? Now that you know how to synthesize sources (thanks to your hard work on MSE #1), try to identify several sources that share common themes.

3. Who are the primary authors/experts whose opinions you will rely on? Provide some background information about their credentials and expertise.
4. Describe the different parts of your paper as you imagine them right now. Can you imagine what some of your main points might be?

5. At this early stage, what do you imagine the thesis of your paper will be? (Remember that a thesis statement evolves through your research and through your writing)

Research Component #4 - The Annotated Bibliography Assignment

What is an annotated bibliography?
When academic writers annotate a reading, they take notes in the margins, on paper, and generally interact with their readings on an intellectual level. Similarly, when writing an annotated bibliography, writers fully document their sources in MLA format and provide notes about the usefulness and the purpose of the source and the author.

Why write an annotated bibliography?
I started including this assignment in the research component after I was required to write annotated bibliographies in graduate school. Getting your sources organized BEFORE writing a paper is, in my opinion, one of the most important keys to writing a quality research paper; my students have commented again and again that this assignment has helped them drastically with learning proper documentation techniques.

How do you locate sources?
- Look in on-line newspapers or magazines for articles of interest to you
- Use the library research databases
- Browse the library’s on-line course catalog
- Look at the different Frontline episodes for areas of interest http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/view/

How do you document the sources once you find them?
You can use Easy Bib.com (or another automated program) or your Simon and Schuster Handbook. If using the handbook, refer to the MLA models on pp. 575-598.

What are the steps in creating your annotated bibliography?
1. Find a total of 10 sources from the library, the internet, or the research databases.
2. Read, annotate, and summarize each source.
3. Document each source using the appropriate MLA model (see Chapter 34 in Simon & Schuster Handbook).
4. After each entry, include the following:
   a. a 2-3 sentence summary of the source
   b. a statement on the value of the source to your research. How might the information feed into your own writing?
   c. A statement of how this source might synthesize with others you have located.