

# Mass Media and Society

## Research Paper Handout

### What is the research paper and why do we have to do it?

The research paper component is a requirement in the course curriculum. So we have to do it. Let's try to make it an enjoyable endeavor of some lasting value.

This paper will serve as evidence of your ability to think critically about a topic and then write about it. Thinking critically involves many things, such as generating original ideas, doing solid research, making objective analyses, and evaluating information, all in the hopes of making sound judgment. In this class, we do that in a well-written, logical and persuasive term paper. The second half of the semester will focus on that paper.

Know that I don't want you to suffer through this project. I have tried to make it as straightforward as possible, using a simple, perennial question that never loses its relevancy. It has been pondered throughout American history.

### What should you write about?

The paper will answer this central question: Is the "The Plague Year" by Lawrence Wright in the New Yorker an example of good journalism people can trust?

The New Yorker piece aims to tell the story of the mistakes and struggles behind America's handling of the COVID crisis. Your paper will build a case as to why or why not that story is an information source that can be trusted. You'll state your case in the thesis and then build that case using five main points throughout the body of the paper, supported and illustrated with specific, real-world examples you obtain from your research. That's it. Easy!

Here is a simple paper outline that lays out the criteria.

**Thesis:** Yes, the article is an example of good journalism that people can trust and here's why. You can also argue that it is not a good example. Just stick to the main ideas below.

**Reason 1:** The New Yorker and its history of getting it right (develop this idea with specific examples gleaned from research)

**Reason 2:** Its stated commitment to truth and accuracy, and its adherence to laws and standards that hold the outlet accountable and demand transparency. (develop this idea with specific examples gleaned from research)

**Reason 3:** The staff of professional journalists who possess a lot of institutional knowledge. Maybe look into Wright's career and success to get a sense of who he is and what he does. (develop this idea with specific examples gleaned from research)

**Reason 4:** The reporting and sources used to tell the story. The breadth of information presented, and the number, quality and relevancy of the sources used to support the facts and quotes.

**Reason 5:** Whatever else you want to use to argue for. Maybe good sourcing or economic preservation or any other reason how or why an outlet is compelled to get it right. (develop this idea with specific examples gleaned from research)

It seems simple. And it is. But it's also not. Within this quick question there is a lot of room for nuance, context, history and perspective. Make of it what you will.

Hopefully you're into reading "The Plague Year." If not, start chipping away at it. A PDF of the article has been posted in the modules. It's a fascinating look at how the virus crisis unfolded a year ago.

I realize learning in this environment is awful (trust me, so is teaching!) and having a template really might help many of you. Come to office hour if you want to talk through your ideas or get help brainstorming.

Be sure to watch the video on the research paper. It gives you background, context, explanation, examples and info on good sources to use for the paper.

## **What else you need to know:**

**Research:** This is a research paper, not an opinion piece or book report or summary or rough draft or collection of your thoughts on a topic. Your paper must have a clear, focused thesis that presents your paper's main point in a sentence or two then proves or illustrates it through research in an organized paper. State your main point in the thesis and then seek to prove it through research.

**Sources:** You must use credible, verifiable sources. DO NOT use Wikipedia, Ask.com, About.com or any other such site on the Internet that solicits non-experts or allows the general public to edit entries. USE TRUSTED NEWS BRANDS AND SCHOLARLY SOURCES. You must use credible sources. If you're not sure what constitutes a credible source, ASK ME! You are required to use **at least** five different sources other than the textbook. You can use the textbook in your paper, but it won't count as one of the five minimum required. What sources you use are up to you, but **they must all be credible sources**. Use current material for research (within the last 5 years).

You must support all facts and quotes with sources. Parenthetical references should be formatted using standard MLA style. A link below to the Owl at Purdue provides info on how to properly cite your sources using MLA style.

**Length:** Your research paper must be 8 to 10 pages long, including the works cited page. It must be typed and double-spaced, using Times New Roman, 12-point font with a maximum of 1-inch margins all around.

**Mechanics:** Your paper must be well written, organized, well researched and largely free of mechanical errors. It must have an introduction. The introduction starts by discussing the subject in the broadest terms and then narrowing it down until it focuses on your thesis.

**Bibliography/Works Cited Page:** Your paper must include a works cited page (a.k.a. a bibliography) using MLA style. Bibliographic entries should be listed alphabetically. Consult the Owl at Purdue using the link below to see how work cited pages should be formatted. If you are unclear about any of this, come to office hour.

The Owl at Purdue:

[Research and Citation Resources](#)

[MLA Works Cited: Electronic Resources](#)

[MLA Formatting and Style Guide](#)

[In-Text \(Citation\) References](#)

Some additional Resources:

*Rules for Writers* by Diana Hacker

*College Writing Skills* by John Langan

[The Schauerman Library at El Camino College has an MLA Citing Sources Guidelines document available here.](#)

These are only four of many, many resources out there to help you with MLA style.

## **Other things:**

Papers must be written in the third person. Do NOT use I, me, we, you, us or anything else that mentions yourself. It is an academic paper and must be in the third person.

Your work should consist of facts and quotes from credible sources, not your personal opinion or first-person accounts or what you've heard someone saying somewhere or what you think might be true simply because you said/thought/typed/Google searched/wrote it. Your sources provide proof that what you say is true or at least plausible. Remember that this paper is worth 100 points. That's a lot in the grand scheme of things, so apply yourself accordingly.

If you're not sure about any of this, ask me! I am here to help.