

Paper 4: Research Paper
ENGL 1302-49, Spring 2012

“An idea, like a ghost, must be spoken to a little before it will explain itself.” (Charles Dickens)

This semester, we have been reading about ways in which social, ethnic, economic, and other factors shape our responses to and representations of disaster. We now expand our study to include a research project on some topic concerning a disaster of your choice. This project, which constitutes a significant portion of your final grade in the course, will contain your final written research paper, a series of preparatory assignments leading up to the paper, and a packet containing all of your research notes and documentation. You will submit many of these components to an electronic Research Blog, accessed via Blackboard. You should keep copies of all work as you complete it, since you will be required to turn in much of your work, including copies of all sources you use, with your final paper. See below for a checklist and description of the various components of the Research Assignment and their due dates; it is up to you to stay on top of all assignments as they are due. In addition, we will work through several exercises in class throughout the semester to help you practice the various skills required to complete an excellent paper. Be sure to keep all of these completed assignments on file, either electronically or in a research binder.

Research Paper Deadlines

 Research Paper Prospectus [Due Tues, 4/3]: You will submit a short (1 page) proposal in paragraph form. In the proposal, you should do the following: state your choice of topic as an opinion requiring proof (tentative thesis), clearly connect your proposed topic to the course theme, and include information about at least two (2) credible sources that will be useful in your research.

Please keep the following requirements in mind when choosing your topic:

- Your topic must be in keeping with the theme of the course, and it must be approved by the instructor. This class concerns representations of disaster, whether natural, manmade, or literary. Your research paper should examine a particular disaster of your choice through one or more of the topical or theoretical lenses we have discussed in class. You may not write about the disasters structuring the course syllabus about which you have already written this semester (e.g. the Great Fire, the Great Plague, Katrina, etc.).
- Students tend to choose very broad topics that require extensive narrowing; be sure to focus on a specific aspect of a broader topic.
- As you make your selection, keep in mind that your final paper must be persuasive. That means you need to select a topic for which you choose a side or address a problem that requires you to articulate a specific point of view; your topic must be transformed into an opinion. As with all the essays you write in ENGL 1302, you must successfully present your point of view with specific details and textual evidence in an attempt to persuade your reader to concur with your position. To create a persuasive thesis rather than simply an informative one, you'll need to immerse yourself in the topic and read a variety of opinions. Note that you may very well decide to alter your thesis once you have completed your research and sit down to write your first draft.

_____ **Annotated Works Cited page [Annotations 1-3 due Tues, 4/5; full draft of Annotated Works Cited page due Tues, 4/10]:** As you research, read, and discern the value of your sources, it is imperative that you keep and update a working Annotated Works Cited list. By completing the annotations BEFORE writing your draft, you will save time, reduce the risk of plagiarism, and keep your sources organized. Each annotation should be 4-5 sentences long; see the samples on pp. 139-142 in *Criteria* for clarification. This is an important step in the research process, so be sure to do it well.

_____ **Paper Outline [Due Thurs, 4/12]**

_____ **Full Draft / Individual Conferences [Tues, 4/17 or Thurs, 4/19]**

_____ **Research Notes [Due with final paper]:** You will select your preferred method of note-taking and submit electronically (via the Bb research blog) complete typed (or written/scanned) notes for *each source*.

_____ **Final Research Paper with Annotated Works Cited list [Due Thurs, 4/26]:** Your final research paper must be persuasive in nature, between 8-10 pages in length, and must include proper parenthetical documentation. The Annotated Works Cited page, typed and formatted in proper MLA style, must be turned in with your final draft, along with a copy of each source you use in your final paper (preferably in electronic form, via the Bb research blog). **Note: Failure to complete any of the components satisfactorily by the due dates listed will result in a deduction from the final RP grade.**

Guidelines for Research Sources

Research Sources: In order to use your sources effectively, you will need to read them, summarize them, and skillfully incorporate their useful data or claims into your paper to support your own thesis. You may not simply cut and paste sentences that look interesting. Rather, determine the author's stance, claims, and credibility before deciding to incorporate the material.

You will be required to collect **a total of 8 sources (minimum)**.

1. Two of these sources must be **secondary analyses from peer-reviewed scholarly journals** and/or academic texts in the SMU databases, such as JSTOR or Academic Search Complete. They may be essays or articles, but not newspaper or magazine articles. They may not be from magazines considered to be a part of popular culture (*People*, *About.com*, etc.).
2. One source must be a **primary source** that you analyze. This may be a photograph, letter, newspaper clipping, radio spot, interview, artwork, etc. Be sure to provide a full, original analysis of the source. In other words, you should be analyzing the source rather than relying on what others have written about the source.
3. In order to encourage you not to abandon the valuable hard copy resources at the library, at least two of your sources must be **print, non-internet sources from the SMU library**. You may use Inter-library Loan to fulfill this requirement.

4. The other sources may be publications from organizations, newspaper articles, educational videos, or more scholarly papers. Many of these may be found on websites, but your web sources must pass the credibility test outlined in *The Curious Researcher*.
5. One of your sources may be a text that we discussed this semester in class.
6. You will be required to turn in a copy of every source you use along with your final research paper.

SMU's Online Databases: Be advised that the excellent online databases that SMU's library system offers are very different from the general Internet websites mentioned in the preceding section. Although you must have two non-digital sources, you may freely use the academic databases offered by SMU for all your other sources. These databases, such as JSTOR, CQ Researcher and InfoTrac One File, reference many excellent articles and essays of academic interest, and often feature full-text articles online that include solid research and distinguished bibliographies. These are considered scholarly sources and may be consulted as legitimate sources for your research.

Sample Topics

A few topics to consider:

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| - Japanese Tsunami(s) | - Hiroshima/Nagasaki |
| - Great Plague of London (1665) | - Earthquakes in Turkey or Haiti |
| - Israel/Palestine bombings (1967) | - NYC garment fire (1911) |
| - September 11, 2001 | - Great Chicago Fire (1871) |
| - Johnstown Flood (1889) | - Dallas fire of 1860 |

Once you have chosen a disaster on which to focus, you will need to identify the key issue or question that will drive your research and argument. The disaster will serve as a case study for your argument, but it is the question, issue, or angle you select that will structure your approach. You may not simply summarize "what happened"; instead, you will need to make a case for how and why a particular event is important to our social, political, or cultural milieu. A successful research paper will move beyond presenting information about a topic and, by synthesizing various sources with the writer's personal opinions, analyze why and how that information is important. In thinking through the angle or lens from which you approach the disaster you have selected, you may want to look back through your class notes. What class discussions or presentations did you find particularly interesting? Why? Here are a few more ideas:

- Aid/economy (Who should take responsibility after disasters? Are there more or less effective and/or ethical ways to aid victims of disaster?)
- Genre/representation (How do different genres [e.g. news accounts vs. personal narratives] spin disaster accounts differently? Why and how does it matter? How does the media affect not only one's response to disaster but also, arguably, the disaster itself?)
- Spatial orientation/disorientation (How do disasters affect one's environment and self-identity? On an ecological note, how do disasters affect environments over time?)
- Race/gender (How do disasters affect people differently based on race, gender, or other aspects of identity that are not immediately connected to the disaster?)