Explore Topics: Requirements

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General Instructions

1. For each page, synthesize the reading and research by writing in complete sentences in essay format.
   a. Use the green instructions in the notes below each page to focus your research and writing.
   b. Write about each question, prompt, or process provided in those notes.
   c. Write a full page of text with lots of detail (about 250 words).
      i. Don’t generalize so much that your writing is devoid of detail.
      ii. Don’t repeat yourself.
   d. Cite each source by adding a hyperlink in the Title of the Article or law.
   e. Do not change the template:
      i. Text must be 14 point Lato left-justified type.
      ii. Refrain from adding extra margins or double spacing.
      iii. Do not bullet the paragraphs. Write in essay format only.
   f. Add additional pages if you need more room.

2. Add all sources to the Bibliography page.
   a. Include author, year, title, publisher, and URL.
   b. Number or bullet them using the list button.

When in doubt, write to the instructor for clarification using the Canvas Inbox.
Writing Requirements

To fully convey the message of multiple sources, the writer must put together the main arguments/points in his or her own words while capturing the essence of the original materials. The essays should be detailed in explaining what supporting information has been discovered and how it relates to the overall question(s) being asked. The assignments for this class are divided into two categories: Explore Topics Files and Examine a Case Discussions. One of the key points made in the Writing Requirements and Samples document is the difference in expectations regarding how Explore Topics Files and Examine a Case Discussions are to be created. The former requires at least 250 words per page while the latter about 150 words per requirement. But both should provide in-depth insights into the issue being explored, should be written in third-person (mostly) and should be in essay style. The formatting specifics for the two differ slightly. The Explore Topics Files summarize a single article (or some other source) while the Examine a Case Discussions synthesize a wide range of sources (including articles and laws) on a topic to ensure student participation and engagement. These discussions are more wide-ranging in opinions, but should clearly be based in factual support.
Citation Methods

Properly cited works will fuel not only better reading experiences but also the subsequent discussions. When in the course of addressing a question or issue, all facts that support writing should be cited. It is important to hyperlink back to the original source material that is being referenced. The first reference to a source should include the full title (and should be linked) while the second reference using the same source will typically include just the author's name and date of publication — a standard citation practice in modern academic writing. Links back to original sources should be done through simple phrases or words that maybe only obliquely reference the source. Any source cited should have a link back to the original so readers can easily navigate them. This includes everything from articles to court cases to laws/codes/statutes. Obviously, not all sources cleanly fit into this mold all of the time. If there is no author, use the proper name of the site being sourced. And the sources that feed information into Wikipedia pages are a better option than Wikipedia itself. While it's important that bibliographic entries are included with Explore Topics files (not Examine a Case discussions), it is not necessary to cite sources written by the instructor, but we should cite sources mentioned by the instructor. The OSU library will be an important resource for completing assignments for this class so proper citations all sources compiled from the library needs to be taken seriously. All library journal articles include a permalink icon which will allow the writer to include that source in the bibliography.
Synthesis writing is at the heart of not only this course’s requirements, but plays a crucial role in our ability to communicate thoroughly with others. Beyond a simple recitation of facts, synthesis writing allows the writer to use his or her own voice to fully explain issues and concepts that originated in various sources. Synthesis writing combines two or more summaries that results in a thesis-driven essay, according to Sandra Jamieson’s On-Line Resources for Writers. The key, according to Jamieson, is that good synthesis writing will allow the reader to very quickly identify overlapping points shared by multiple sources, while making sense of those sources to allow greater understanding. This way of processing information applies to most aspects of life, not just academic writing, as explained in the Synthesizing Information video. Forming personal opinions through layering of multiple sources is a process that can be translated into the world of writing. To bolster this point, MIT researcher Ed Boyden, in the 2007 MIT Technology Review essay How To Think: Managing brain resources in an age of complexity, promotes the idea of being a constant active reader — never passive — and to continuously synthesize new information to grow our opinions.
In Cui Zhang’s “Effect of instruction on ESL students’ synthesis writing,” it was discovered that many students -- including those at the university level -- struggled to successfully synthesize multiple sources about a topic into a single essay that provided an accurate and in-depth look at the issue being discussed. This problem is exacerbated when students are attempting to synthesize sources in a language that is not their primary language. Zhang attributes a relative inability to accurately synthesize university-level materials to a lack of classroom instruction for English as a Second Language students. Previous studies had shown that students wanted to learn more about synthesis writing, and that many were not sure how to define it compared to other forms of writing. Zhang attempted to determine whether a single semester of classroom instruction, focusing on better reading comprehension, could result in positive effects on synthesis abilities. The result of Zhang’s study showed significant increases in synthesis essay test scores for students who received classroom instruction compared the control group, which received unchanged classroom instruction. In the end, there could be an argument for including synthesis writing in ESL classroom instruction at every level, despite the task being naturally difficult even for university students. Zhang argues that teachers should implement a “scaffolding” system to help students understand the tasks. This would include reading guides before, during and after reading selections as a way to help students identify main ideas and separate them from supporting details. Also, dividing a large project into manageable steps was advised as a way to ensure those smaller details are learned.
Illustration Requirements

This infographic by Bersin (a division of Deloitte) attempts to break down how the “modern learner” behaves. Of particular interest is the distracted nature of modern learners and how businesses should provide creative training opportunities in an age when many are going outside of traditional training paths as they seek advancement in their jobs.

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Avoiding Plagiarism

Aside from direct quotes (which would be cited anyway), all words must be original to the writer — even when synthesizing other people’s works. Don’t assume anything. If you want to include statistics, laws, cases or anything else that isn’t your own original thought, cite it. After all, that information had to come from somewhere and it wasn’t your brain. As for direct quotes, this should be done sparingly. Instead, it is better to use your own words and paraphrase the original source material. This logic applies not just to words, but also images and videos. Make sure copyright statements are included where applicable and are clearly giving credit to the creator. Original sources are important and should be cited, but also know the rules around “fair use.” Also, don’t plagiarize your own previous works. It’s OK to go back and look at old essay for inspiration or broad ideas, but don’t repurpose entire sections of essay or whole essays entirely. Purchasing papers should be done for reference purposes only, not as actual source materials. Collaborate only when allowed and even in that case, make sure everybody’s work and words are their own. Own your research and stick to what you personally can add to a project rather than citing other people’s legwork.
Checking Originality

Originality is important when dissecting multiple sources and then constructing your own narrative to explain the deeper meaning that might connect them. To ensure students are not simply lifting copy from other people's work, their writing will go through the TurnItIn plagiarism checking system. This process will produce an Originality Report for every assignment. The expectation is that students are not stealing intellectual property from others, but instead are using it as a springboard to develop their own unique works. When assignments are submitted, the Originality Report (in the Grades section on Canvas) will show how much of the work was truly original. Students should not rely solely on the flag or the percentage given — they are expected to open the file and investigate any possible areas of plagiarism and fix them. Some details that might show up in a report can be ignored, such as tables of content, titles of articles, quotes, common phrases, etc. Students can — and should — revise their work after look at the Originality Report before the due date. Once the due date passes, the assignment is closed and revisions will no longer be accepted. In summation, paraphrase and use your own words to explain a concept and always cite specific details that came from sources.

