

Final Papers

- How to construct an argument
- How to use secondary/primary Sources
- Organizing your essay
- Other stylistic issues & tips

1

Having an Argument

- Your paper must have an argument or thesis
 - It just can't have narrative description (although that is required)
- Many types of arguments
 - Causation:
 - Version 1: “The movie *The Andromeda Strain* (1970) influenced popular perceptions of the vulnerability of the human body.
 - Version 2: “The movie *The Andromeda Strain* (1970) influenced popular perceptions of the vulnerability of the human body, although microbiologists saw the movie as damaging the credibility of their science.”
 - Change over time:
 - The early generation of superhero movies in the early 2000s barely depicted women superheroes but such portrayals became common in the 2010s.
 - Change over time + causation
 - The early generation of superhero movies in the early 2000s barely depicted women superheroes but such portrayals became common in the 2010s. One factor in this shift was the increased number of women in management positions of the major film studios.
 - Expression/Reflection
 - The popularity of anthropomorphic aliens in Hollywood movies reflects our own biases and expectations and has no scientific basis.

2

A thesis should NOT have:

- Judgments (moral or otherwise)
 - “People who believed in aliens were stupid.”
- Overly broad or obvious arguments:
 - “Because of major technological changes in the 20th century, popular science also changed.”
 - “People have believed in aliens for a long time.”
- Some tips/hints
 - be specific
 - Once again: three possible ways to develop an argument
 - think about causation: x and y caused z to happen
 - think about change over time: x changed to y over time, and z was the cause
 - Think about a popular cultural contribution (movie, book, etc.) representing some aspect of culture

3

Organizing your Essay

- Super important!
- There's no one correct way to do this; I show here one possible way
- Have a title!
 - can also use an epigraph
- Introduction
 - Introduce your topic, the theme of your paper, and briefly outline your argument/thesis sentence
 - Example: “In the 1970s, NASA sent two spacecraft into the cosmos, to fly past the outer planets and then escape the solar system. NASA recruited a number of important scientists such as Carl Sagan to create a ‘message’ to possible extraterrestrials who might find these spaceships. These messages were included on the Pioneer plaque showing two human beings and later, on the Voyager Golden Record. This essay uses interviews and writings by Sagan to explore why Sagan chose the specific images and music for the Voyager Golden Record. It argues that his choices were deeply influenced by his own biases and cultural assumptions and less by representing actual “global culture.”

4

Main Portion of Paper

- The main body of the paper can be divided into two parts
- Provide a bit of history and background (1-2 pages)
- Then have the main part of the paper, about 3-5 pages on your topic. Basically, this is where you use evidence (primary and secondary sources) to build a case for your overall argument. You can use some exposition and background material here
- Begin each paragraph with topic sentences!
 - Each paragraph should represent one point that supports your main argument
 - Evidence that adds depth to your one point
 - Evidence that furthers your overall argument
 - No tangents, no superfluous information
 - Ask yourself: What is this paragraph doing?
 - is it useful for my overall argument?
 - is it advancing anything here?

5

Primary Sources

- Must use primary sources
 - at least one (set of) primary source(s)
- Think carefully about how important/influential/relevant the primary source is to your question
- Can use media
 - Movies/TV shows
 - Explore background!! (director, motivations of director, making of movie)
 - Explore reception!!! (find reviews, find audience responses, etc.)
 - Books/Fiction
 - Non-fiction Books by science popularizers (Sagan, etc.)
 - Comics
 - Science websites/magazines
 - Interviews with key individuals
 - New York Times, media, etc.

6

How do you use a primary source?

- Use primary sources to:
 - make an original claim
 - to emphasize a point by using a quote
- Carl Sagan had been thinking of something like the Voyager Golden Record for many years. He said in an interview in 1977 that he “began to think of creating a message for aliens already in the early 1960s.” [*← that's a primary source*] In his memoirs, he said that the idea came to him while he was a graduate student at Harvard. [*← cite a primary source*]
- Stan Lee always considered Marvel Comics to have social commentary. He said in an interview in 1977 that ”everything I wrote was designed to comment on our society even though I did it through the superhero genre.” [*← that's a primary source*]

7

Secondary Sources

- Need to cite at least five of them in paper
 - Academic books, academic journal articles
 - No blogs, random websites, rants, message boards
- When to use secondary sources in paper:
 - To provide a reference to a historical event/fact
 - e.g.: The Voyager space missions were launched in 1977. [*← use a secondary source as a citation*]
 - e.g.: Marvel Comics was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1961 [*← use a secondary source as a citation*]
 - To show what others have said about this topic before

8

Conclusion

- a paragraph or two
- sum up your argument/thesis again
- maybe add something striking, a nice turn of phrase to conclude.

9

Stylistic Stuff

- NO CONTRACTIONS!
 - ~~Can't~~ = cannot
 - ~~It's~~ = it is
 - Know difference: Its vs. It's =
 - ~~Didn't~~ = did not
 - Etc. (do not write etc. in your papers, or *et cetera*)

10

Tenses & Punctuation

- Tense
 - only use past tense
- Punctuation must be placed **before** quote marks
 - “This is how you quote a sentence.”
 - “Not like this”.
 - Also, don’t use stand-alone quotes:
 - This is correct:
 - In his memoirs, John Smith noted that he had “no reason to doubt the existence of Bigfoot.”
 - This is not correct:
 - In this memoirs. John Smith wrote about Bigoot. “I have no reason to doubt the existence of Bigfoot.”

11

Spacing, Quotes, Italics, etc.

- Make sure the paper is 12 pt font, double-spaced
- Do not use very long quotes in your paper!
- If you use a block quote, make it single-spaced
- Always italicize the names of books, movies, journals, comics, etc.
 - *2001: A Space Odyssey*
 - *The Journal of Atmospheric Physics*
 - *The Amazing Spider-Man*
 - *The Boys*

12

Citations

- Use whichever system you want, but be consistent
- If you use footnotes, make sure to reduce the fontsize of the footnotes and make them single-spaced

13

FOOTNOTES!

- How do you use footnotes?
 - Insert footnote numbers at the end of the sentence.
 - The numbers should be consecutive, not out of order
 - The actual footnote should be at the bottom of the page
- Different types of sources have to be shown in different forms
 - ARTICLES:
 - Jane Doe, "Zombies versus Vampires," *Journal of the Good Looking Vampires* 6 (2010): 7-22, URL
 - BOOKS:
 - Jane Doe, *Wow; I Wrote A Book* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 9-11, URL
- Use the short version of footnote after first citation

14