

The Researched Essay

For this Researched Essay, you will examine a current, specific, and debatable topic to explore and present to a specific audience of your choice.

What will your topic be? You have two choices:

1. Investigate a theme that has emerged from our **introduction to language politics**. You could respond to one of the claims made in our texts or research your own question (personal connections welcome) to highlight a perspective not considered or dealt with adequately in the readings. Consider language and literacy's relationship with one or more of the following issues: identity, culture, and background; social and linguistic hierarchies; government, educational, and (socio)economic structures; public and cultural perceptions and values; family, personal, and other interpersonal dynamics and conflicts; accent politics; the dominance of standardized English; language subordination; race and racism. These are just broad themes. Your goal is to get specific (e.g., you could investigate the obstacles facing new immigrants from the Dominican Republic when learning English in ESL classes in NYC public schools, or you could examine the ways in which language and race play a role in hiring practices). The more specific, the better.
2. Investigate any topic of your liking. While I encourage folks to seriously consider option 1, what's most important is that you choose a topic that genuinely interests you or that you are motivated to learn more about. This is why option 2 is available. Whatever it is, the topic must be controversial or debatable in some way, allowing you to explore multiple perspectives and determine your own stance. While it's not necessary that you already have a strong stance on the issue, having some background knowledge or prior experience with the topic could help.

Who will be your intended audience? Will they be your classmates and instructors? Friends or family? The general public? An academic crowd? Is your audience informed or uninformed about the topic? What are their interests and values? Do their perspectives on the issue jive or conflict with yours?

What will your purpose be? Your purpose will depend on your goals, how much you know about your topic, and what your audience needs. If you're not all that familiar with your topic, perhaps your purpose will be to explore the issue and to inform your reader what you find. If you're ready to take a strong stance on the topic, your purpose might be to argue your case, and you'll have to decide whether to argue "gently" or "fiercely" depending on your goals and what your audience might find persuasive.

What sources will you use? Your Researched Essay must include **4-7 sources** comprised of the following:

- 1-2 scholarly sources specific to your topic that you locate. This can take the form of a peer-reviewed academic research article, a chapter in a scholarly book, a scholarly website (.edu), or reference work (e.g., encyclopedia).
- 2-3 non-scholarly sources. If pursuing the topic of language and literacy, you may fulfill this requirement by using 2-3 of our course texts. Otherwise, locate sources such as websites (public affairs, advocacy, government, commercial), statistics, essays, articles (newspaper, magazine, blog), press releases, documentaries, and literature.
- 1-2 multimedia sources: video/movie clips, photographs, images, memes, (political) cartoons, sound bites, links, lyrics, Tweets, graphs, etc.

What will you “do” in your essay? You will aim to practice several writing strategies:

1. **Determine what rhetorical “moves” you’ll use.** As you write this essay, consider your own goals alongside your audience’s needs and expectations: What will capture their interest? What sorts of evidence will they find credible and/or persuasive? What tone will appeal to them? What sorts of claims will be welcome? What sorts of claims will cause alarm? What sort of conclusion will compel them? How much do you want to adhere to or defy audience expectations? You are encouraged to personalize the delivery of your essay as you see fit—you decide the order, tone, style, and language you’ll craft in order to best achieve your goals. **You’re welcome to draw on your “native,” “home,” or “other” languages, literacies, and ways of being as you so choose.**
2. **Summarize, paraphrase, and quote.** You will introduce each source in your paper by providing a brief (1-3 sentence) *summary* of the rhetorical situation (the audience, genre, publication, purpose, and context) **and** its overall argument. Then, in order to highlight more specific ideas/connections, you will strike a balance between *paraphrasing* and *quoting* key ideas/passages from sources.
3. **Take a Stance.** You might find yourself more aligned with one text’s ideas and feeling like your perspectives differ (a lot or even just slightly) from another; you might appreciate one writer’s ideas but want to complicate those ideas (yes, such-and-such is true, *but...*); you might find yourself generating an entirely new perspective as a result of seriously considering what others have argued; or maybe your stance is that you refuse to take a strong stance until more information is gathered. Whatever your stance, it is important to make it clear throughout your essay. **Any claims you make should be relevant, explicit, specific, qualified, and complicated.**
4. **Signpost.** You will provide “signposts” (or “metacommentary”) throughout your essay—topic sentences, transitions, and other “guiding” language aimed at helping your reader follow along and make sense of what connections exist between sources, ideas, examples, you, and your claims. Sometimes this means using language like “According to X” to **attribute an idea to its author**. Other times this means **making clear the relationship between one source and another**: Do the sources support, extend, challenge, or complicate each other? And sometimes it means emphasizing difference: “While X believes Y, I argue that...”

How much source work and how much of “you” should there be? About half of the essay will be your source work (summary, paraphrase, and quotations from sources) and the other half will be you (*your* interpretations, ideas, and examples, transitions, connection making, and claims).

General requirements. Your Researched Essay should be **5-6 pages** (12-point font, 1-inch margins, double spaced) plus any images you choose to include. Please use **MLA citation** within the body of your essay and on a **Works Cited page**, and please compose a relative and **inviting title** for your essay.

“A” Option: If pursuing an “A” in the course, your essay will be 7-8 pages long and you will use the maximum amount of sources in what’s outlined above, though one of your academic sources must be a peer-reviewed scholarly article.

Cover Letter. The final version of your essay should be preceded by a Cover Letter. Refer to the Cover Letter assignment sheet in our course materials.

Due Dates:

- A proposal of your RE is due on **DAY, MONTH DATE.**
- A full draft of the RE is due for peer review on **DAY, MONTH DATE.**
- The final draft of the RE is due **DAY, MONTH DATE.**

Assessment Rubric for the Researched Essay

Assignment Criteria

1. Audience Awareness. How effectively are ideas, arguments, and sources introduced given the specific audience, their perspectives, and expectations?

2. Source Use. How effectively are ideas and sources delivered and developed in the essay? How effective, specific, and appropriate are the examples and passages used? How effectively and accurately does the essay introduce and summarize the rhetorical situations and main ideas from each source used? How effectively are more specific ideas/passages paraphrased and/or quoted?

3. Stance. How relevant, explicit, specific, qualified, and complicated are the claims throughout the essay? How effective is the relationship between stance and evidence? Are the claims made “warranted” by the evidence? That is, are appropriate/relevant ideas pulled out from the source use to establish the writer’s thesis/stance?

4. Signposting. How effectively are readers “guided” throughout the essay so that ideas, sources, and different claims are clearly attributed and distinguished from one another? Are the perspectives and relationship across texts named explicitly? That is, are ideas from across texts shown as *supporting*, *extending*, *complicating*, and/or *challenging* one another?

5. Revision, Editing, and Formatting. Does the essay show evidence of thoughtful revision and editing? Has the essay been effectively formatted, including the title, in-text citations, and Works Cited page?

6. General Requirements. Were all general requirements for length, source use, and due date met?