

English 102

Researched Paper

This is the first requirement for good writing: truth; not the truth . . . but some kind of truth -- a connection between the things written about, the words used in writing, and the author's real experience in the world he knows well -- whether in fact or dream or imagination.

--Ken Macrorie

This research assignment will involve a deeper inquiry into the topics we've examined this quarter: fairy tales, folklore, and myth, and issues of obedience and authority. In your researched paper, you will explore some of the intersections of these separate topics and see how and where they overlap and connect to create our unifying theme of "Myth America." To do so, you will need to find, use, and cite scholarly critical sources in addition to those in our text, so you'll have the opportunity in your search to use the databases you were introduced to on our library tour.

By now, you should have chosen a topic and should be close to formulating your thesis. Although you should have a flexible working thesis (or a hypothesis), it's good to keep an open mind about your exact thesis as you do your initial research; the best inquiries begin as a general curiosity that eventually leads you to your specific thesis. But don't wait too long to decide on a specific focus for your research, or you will run out of time.

An important thing to remember about research writing is that you are *not* going to the library looking for something that necessarily already exists, which you then simply summarize; rather, by evaluating the work of other writers and combining their ideas with your own, you are creating an original piece of work based on your questions, your findings, and your own informed opinions. You're not a human photocopier, reproducing what is already "out there": you are *making new knowledge* and reaching conclusions based on your analyses and evaluations of the information you find, not simply relating or retelling other people's arguments.

Note that this essay is called a **researched** paper rather than a research paper: the difference is in the style and tone of the finished product. Instead of assembling a collection of quotes and producing a faceless, authorless, third-person "objective" essay, you will compose an essay, written in the first person, that is clearly the work of a writer who has a point of view and a stake in the topic. You need to put the topic into context, making it clear **why this issue is important** and **why we should care about it** (this is often called the "so what?" question).

In addition to presenting your research, you will also reflect on the research and writing process itself. The final paper will be presented in four parts plus an abstract, described as follows:

Abstract

This is a brief summary of your own essay, one-half to one page long. As with any good summary, it should reflect the thesis of your essay. (For a sample abstract, look at the one of Milgram's experiments reprinted in Baumrind's essay in our text.) Although the abstract appears at the beginning of your finished paper, it will be written last.

Part 1 -- What I Want to Know and Why

In this section, discuss what led you to your topic in the first place, answering questions such as the following:

- Why did I choose this topic?
- Why or how is it important to me?
- How is it connected to the topics and theme of the class?
- What questions did the readings in class either raise or answer for me?
- What do I already know about my topic?
- What do I assume or imagine to be true about my topic?
- What do I want to know more about?

Part 2 -- The Search for Information and Focus

In the second section, tell how you focused your inquiry and found your information:

- What sources of information did I investigate (journal articles, books, films)?
- Which were most helpful?
- Which led to other sources of information, and which were dead ends?
- How did I focus my initial rough idea into a clear research question?

Part 3 -- What I Learned

In the third section, tell what you learned about the topic itself:

- What have I learned that answered my original questions or raised new ones?
- What *haven't* I learned?
- How have my opinions and beliefs been changed or confirmed?
- What surprised me?

Part 4 -- Self-Reflection/Self-Evaluation

In the last section, evaluate and reflect on your revised understanding of the theme of our course ("Myth America"), as well as the processes of researching and writing:

- How do my findings connect to our readings and our theme of Myth America?
- How can I define "Myth America"?
- How has my research made our classwork more meaningful?
- How would I have done my research differently if I knew then what I know now?
- What have I learned about doing research?
- How successful is my finished product?

These questions should give you an idea of what to address in each part. In writing the four parts, don't go through and answer each of these questions lock step; use the questions as a guide to your thinking and writing, not as a mandate, but do respond to the ideas suggested for each part.

Your final paper will be separated into the four parts (plus the abstract), as described above. Parts 1, 2, and 4 are reflections on the processes of researching and writing: you are examining the questions you attempted to answer (Part 1); describing the steps you went through (Part 2); and presenting a final evaluation of your own work (Part 4). These three parts will each be shorter than Part 3, which is essentially the heart of the paper; in Part 3, you will report in depth what you discovered in your search and how it relates to our work in class.

In considering a topic, keep in mind that you want to choose something that is manageable in the time and space you have available. This means finding a thesis that you can investigate in some depth in the short time we have. Researching and writing on symbolism in folklore might be a good idea if you plan to spend the rest of your life on it, but if you envision a

more modest project, you need to scale it down a bit; for instance, you might look at the symbolic elements in a specific fairy tale, or at one or two symbols in different fairy tales.

Perhaps most important, remember that in addition to the presentation of “facts,” you need to explore the **meaning and significance** of your findings and to put the information into **context** for your readers. Research doesn’t occur in a vacuum; it must be based on your own curiosity, questions, and knowledge about the materials we’ve read and discussed this quarter, which you will use as a starting point for further research. The answers you find and the conclusions you draw are based on the information you discover in your research.

Some Basics:

1. If you need help in your library computer search, be sure to ask one of the reference librarians for assistance in finding materials.
2. Remember that you need to be persistent and imaginative in conducting your search, which is like a treasure hunt. Take a few minutes before you even begin at the computer to formulate a preliminary question and brainstorm for synonyms and similar terms for your search words. In addition, be sure to look for sources in areas entirely separate from fairy tales; for instance, if you are exploring obedience in fairy tales, see what you can find on obedience in psychology books or journals, and then you can make the connections to fairy tales yourself. That’s how new knowledge is created. Most important, remember that **not everything you need or want to use will be found by using the computer**. Ultimately you will need to start looking at actual books or journal articles, even if they may not seem to be exactly what you want. Skim through them, looking particularly at their bibliographies to see what sources other writers have used. The main thing is, don’t get discouraged. (Don’t forget to use the materials on reserve.)
3. Remember that you must **evaluate** and make judgments about the quality of your sources. You may want to include some internet sources, but don’t rely on them exclusively; they are much harder to evaluate than books or journal articles, because there is no peer-review process as there is in scholarly publishing. Making use of the scholarly databases (MLA and others) will guide you to materials that are more appropriate to your purpose than relying on a search engine like Google. Try to present a balance of different kinds of critical sources, emphasizing refereed books and journal articles. Distinguishing between “fact” and “opinion” (and between good opinions and bad) is difficult, but it is fundamental to research. (Remember: GIGO.)
4. You need to be aware of the distinction between **primary sources** and **secondary sources**. Primary sources are the object of your inquiry (for instance, *Cinderella*), and secondary sources are critical discussions of those primary sources (such as Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment*). For this assignment, you will need to **find and use mostly secondary sources** as a way of investigating your topic and supporting your assertions.
5. I can’t specify an exact number of sources, but citing fewer than five or six scholarly critical (secondary) sources, beyond the ones in our text, is an indication of an insubstantial and probably inadequate search. In other words, citing six different fairy tales is not adequate if you

have not also included several secondary sources in your analysis of those fairy tales. You may use the sources in our text, but only *in addition* to several others.

6. Just as I can't tell you the exact number of sources you need, I also can't tell you precisely how long the finished product should or will be. My best guess is that it should be approximately 8 - 10 pages, but it will depend on you and your topic. Don't pad it out with irrelevancies (nor use a large font and wide margins) just to increase the page count; quality matters more than quantity, but producing a strong, convincing analysis requires adequate detail and development.

7. The tone and voice of this essay will differ from the typical academic "research paper" (it will be first-person, not third-person), but the emphasis is still on the process of doing rigorous research, looking for answers to questions. Stringing together long quotes and passages from a number of texts does not add up to research; there must be an issue at the core.

8. Your finished paper should be separated into the four parts, like the chapters of a book, each with its own title (use the ones I've provided or make up your own). The four parts should all work together to develop your ideas and your thesis, making clear the connections between what you've learned in your research and what we've discussed in class.

9. In addition to the need for rigor and depth, you also need to use proper documentation, either MLA or APA form, and provide a list of works cited. Don't forget that internet sources, films, and any other nonprint sources you cite must be documented. Be sure to use the method of parenthetical citation, *not* footnotes or endnotes, and be sure to follow all of the documentation guidelines exactly. Keep in mind that *only* the works you actually cite should be listed; those you looked at but finally did not include should not be listed. We'll go over the MLA and APA documentation guidelines in class, so don't worry if you're not already familiar with them.

10. The final product should be typed, double spaced, and you should include all of your drafts. Be sure to include a title page (with the title of your paper, your name, the date, class, and my name). **Failure to include these items will lower your final grade.**

11. On _____, we will have a draft workshop; you will need to **bring four copies** of your draft with you to class. Do not come to class if you don't have your draft and the copies.

12. On _____, you will give a brief oral presentation of your research to the class. You may choose either to read your written abstract or to give an impromptu description of your project. In either case, your presentation should be no more than 2 - 3 minutes.

13. This paper is due on _____, **at the beginning of class, IF you wish to have your paper returned by the last class meeting.** If you do **not** wish to have your paper returned by then, **you may turn it in without penalty on _____**, at the beginning of class. **Any paper turned in after _____ will be substantially penalized.** Keep in mind that whether you turn your paper in on _____ or _____, all oral reports must be done on _____.