

Graded Writing Assignment

Writing Skills: A Research Project

This assignment is intended to assist you in composing a personal research project, fulfilling the requirements for the second writing assignment in your *Written Communication* course. The assignment outlines your options for the project and describes what's involved in completion of each option. It redefines the first-person point of view (which you mastered in completion of your first writing assignment in this course) and why it's necessary. Finally, the assignment offers several different ideas for inclusion.

If you need to do so, refer back to the graded writing assignment, *Writing Skills: A Personal Narrative*, to review the essential parts of an essay, as well as the steps of the writing process and assistance with grammar and mechanics.

By the end of this assignment, you should be ready to submit your essay for grading.

When you complete this assignment, you'll be able to

- Identify and effectively use the first-person point of view in conjunction with research
- Use research to enhance ideas and opinions
- Use resources to improve grammar and mechanics
- Write a research paper without plagiarizing
- Construct a personal research paper using MLA format

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WRITING SKILLS: A RESEARCH PROJECT

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SUMMARY

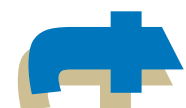
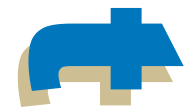
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Writing Skills: A Research Project

For your second and final writing assignment in this course, you're being asked to construct a variation of a personal essay, which can also be referred to as a *research project*. The essay that you produce must be based on a combination of personal experience(s) and research, it must be told primarily from the first-person point of view, and it must meet the given length requirement of 500 to 1,500 words.

The essay that you write should be a direct response to one of the two prompts offered. It should offer your ideas and opinions and use research as support. This essay, much like the personal narrative, will be directed toward a general and unfamiliar audience—people who don't know you personally.

Your finished product should be completely original and contain research *only* as support for your established ideas. You should not rely on the results of your research to *create* your essay, but to *support* ideas of your own. This will help to ensure that your finished project is unique, credible, and ethical.

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROJECT?

A research project is exactly what its name implies: a project (in this case an essay) that utilizes research for support. In a very basic sense, all essays are personal, in that it's impossible to avoid a personal opinion, even in the most objective writing; however, the research project must combine personal opinion with research to produce *supported* arguments and opinions.

While the author doesn't need to hide his personal opinion, he must be sure to use appropriate and accurate research to support his or her ideas. Unlike the personal narrative, the research project requires *more* than the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and personal input of the author.

The essay that you create should clearly state your ideas and opinions, and show the reasoning behind your opinions, as well as identify the ideas you've located to back your opinions through research. These ideas will work together to ultimately show your learned expertise and your authority to write on your chosen topic.

Remember that using others' opinions or ideas in your own words without giving the original author credit isn't proper, even if you agree with them or feel that they best explain your own thoughts and feelings. When you include information obtained from research, you're obligated to cite that information, giving full and deserved credit to the original author. Always remember that research should support your opinion and/or viewpoint; you should ensure that your ideas and opinions (not your researched information) are the main focus of your essay.

YOUR OPTIONS

Be sure to review the grading rubric on page 9 before starting your paper. The rubric can serve as a guide when writing your paper.

There are two distinct topic options for this particular assignment. While each of these options has specific requirements and expectations, there is also a great deal of freedom included with each. Because your essay is being created based on your opinions/ideas and research, no two completed essays will be exactly alike.

Option 1: Personal Take on Current Issues

Choose a current issue in local, national, or international news. Write an editorial piece explaining the issue and offering your opinions and any solutions you can think of that may apply.

You'll need to thoroughly research the issue at hand in order to provide a solid explanation of the issue, as well as *informed* opinions and solutions. You must be sure to provide an appropriate context for the issue you choose; the audience needs to understand why this is a problem that deserves consideration and why you feel your solutions can affect it.

Part of your purpose is to convince your audience that your solutions are viable.

The sample paper at the end of this booklet highlights key requirements of your paper. It is a good idea to review it now.

Option 2: Planning a Career

Choose a career that you would like to pursue. You'll need to thoroughly research your career choice.

You should explain the career to your audience. Although an explanation of the career is certainly necessary, you must be sure to keep the focus of the essay on *yourself* and why you want to enter this particular career field; the focus shouldn't be solely on the career field itself.

Be sure to provide as much detail as possible about your career choice, including what type of education, training, or certification is required; what a typical day or week would be like; what kind of salary you can expect; what the future looks like for employees in this field; and whether or not geography will affect job opportunities.

Part of your purpose is to convince your audience that you're making an informed choice, allowing you a chance at success in the job market.

WHY USE THE FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW?

When writing from the first-person point of view, you're relaying your personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences and speaking for yourself *only*. You can make observations regarding others, but you're not able to speak for them or truly know what they're thinking. In the confines of your research project, you must write from the first-person point of view because the fundamental ideas on which your essay is based are your own.

REVIEW: AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

All work submitted to Penn Foster High School for grading must be entirely original. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “to plagiarize” is “(a) to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own; to use (another’s production) without crediting the source; (b) to commit literary theft; to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.” While these definitions may seem harsh, plagiarism is a very serious offense, and harsh punishment may result from commission of this act.

Blatant, direct copying of another’s words is plagiarism, but paraphrasing another author’s ideas is plagiarism as well. Plagiarism is the theft of words *or* ideas, often both. If you haven’t constructed the logic of your essay by yourself, if you’ve “borrowed” wording that you feel is well-done, or if you’re using another writer’s words and/or ideas to create your own work without giving credit to that writer, you’re likely committing plagiarism.

The most surefire way to avoid plagiarism when writing a research paper is to start from scratch using the writing process. You should use prewriting and planning to map out your ideas before attempting to research your topic. Once you’ve completed your research, you should outline your ideas, including the relevant research you’ve found. Writing your first draft will be relatively simple if you dedicated time to writing a complete and detailed outline. Revising, editing, and proofreading will require the same skills you displayed when writing your first essay. As always, you’re encouraged to follow the directions in the assignment and rely upon your instructors to answer your questions.

If any portion of your writing uses uncited ideas, phrases, or structure from another source, you could earn a failing grade of 1% for the exam. This will be at the discretion of the Penn Foster instructional team.

When a Penn Foster High School exam is found to contain plagiarism, the following steps are taken:

- The exam in question is awarded a grade of 1%.

- Upon posting of the grade, the student gains access to an instructor feedback file, which indicates where the exam content was found, provides an explanation of plagiarism, and extends a warning regarding possible disciplinary action.
- The student is required to complete the retake assignment, constructing an entirely new essay.

Please refer to the section on “Academic Integrity” on page 8 of your *Penn Foster High School Student Catalog* for more information.



This video clip provides information on specific types of plagiarism

10 Types of Plagiarism:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF5eFeJMplA>

If the direct link fails to work, go to youtube.com and type “10 Types of Plagiarism” into the search bar. Next, click on the video clip titled “10 Types of Plagiarism.”

ESSENTIALS: FORMATTING YOUR ESSAY

- Please be sure to include a header at the top of each page that includes your last name and a page number at the right margin.
- The very first page of your essay shouldn’t contain a header, but it should include your name, your student ID number, and the exam number.
- Your paper should be typed and double-spaced using Microsoft Word or another word processing program such as WordPad, X Word, AbiWord, and so on. It must be submitted in .doc, .docx, or .rtf format for grading purposes.
- Use double-spacing, standard one-inch margins, and a font no larger than the equivalent of Times New Roman 12.
- Your final draft should contain between 500 and 1,500 words.

- Please save your document using your student number, the appropriate exam number, and your last name, all connected by underscore symbols. For example, if John Smith's student number was 23456789 and he had completed exam 007130, the file would be saved as 23456789_007130_Smith.

HELPFUL HINTS

To create a header using MS Word, click on the **Insert** tab at the top of the page and then on the Header icon in your toolbar. Choose the blank header. While you're still within the header, click on **Insert** again (if necessary) and then on **Page Number**. First choose the option to place the page number at the top of the page and then the option that will right-justify your page number. Once your page number is in place, type your last name immediately before it with a space in between. Once you click out of the header, your last name should be on each page along with the appropriate page number.

To remove the header from the first page, once again click on the **Insert** tab at the top of the page and then on the **Header** icon in your toolbar. Click on **Edit Header** in the drop-down menu and finally on **Different First Page**.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SUBMITTING

Ask yourself all of the following questions before you even consider submitting your essay for grading. If your answer to even one of these questions is *no*, then you still have some work to do.

- Does my introduction attempt to “hook” the reader?
- Does my essay have a clear and specific thesis statement?
- Does my essay accurately develop the ideas included in the chosen topic option?
- Does my essay include both personal experience and research?
- Have I used the first-person point of view (the pronoun “I”) throughout the essay?
- Have I clearly indicated where paragraphs begin and end?
- Does each of my paragraphs support my thesis statement?
- Does my conclusion summarize and give closure to my essay?
- Have I effectively proofread my essay?
- Have I met the length requirement for this assignment?
- Have I followed MLA style for including both parenthetical and end citations?
- Have I included a Works Cited page?
- Is my essay formatted according to the instructions?
- Have I reviewed the grading rubric on pages 9 and 10?
- Have I reviewed the sample paper at the end of this booklet?

If you have answered *yes* to every question, you’re ready to submit!

Submitting Your Exam

1. Log on to the Student Portal.
2. Click on **Take Exam** next to the assignment you've completed.
3. Follow the instructions provided to submit your exam.

SUMMARY

You've received your second writing assignment for your *Written Communication* course in its entirety, as well as the information needed to complete that assignment!

You've learned what a personal research project is, and you've been given the two topic options that you're able to expand upon for this assignment. You've reviewed what the first-person point of view is and why it's necessary, as well as the basic guidelines for avoiding plagiarism.

You're encouraged to revisit the graded writing assignment for *Writing Skills: A Personal Narrative* in order to review the essential parts of an essay (the introduction, the body, the conclusion, and voice), as well as steps of the writing process and resources to improve your skills in both grammar and mechanics.

GRADING RUBRIC: EXAM 007130	Exemplary	Proficient	Fair	Poor	Not Shown
Grammar and Mechanics (45 points)					
Introduction (5 points): The essay establishes a specific topic and approach and sets an appropriate tone/mood for the rest of the essay. It engages the reader and creates interest.	5	4	3-2	1	0
Coherence and Unity (10 points): Ideas flow clearly and logically as the essay is developed. Each paragraph contains one main idea (with enough detail to develop that idea clearly and logically) and a connection to the ideas that precede and follow it. Clear transitions are present between sentences as well as between paragraphs. The author remains focused on the topic.	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-1	0
Sentence Structure (10 points): Sentences are varied in both structure and length. Sentences are complete, expressive, clear, and to the point. The essay includes no run-on sentences or fragments.	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-1	0
Spelling, Word Choice, Grammar and Punctuation (15 points): Essay is free of spelling errors. Appropriate language is chosen for each situation, fitting the mood/tone set in the introduction. Word choice complements, does not inhibit, clarity. Essay utilizes correct and consistent verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, clear pronoun-antecedent agreement, and so on. Grammar errors do not interfere with comprehension. Essay is free of errors such as comma splices, misplaced commas, and inappropriate end punctuation. All punctuation is used correctly so as not to inhibit clarity. Errors should not interrupt or distract the reader.	15-14	13-11	10-7	6-1	0
Conclusion (5 points): The conclusion provides adequate closure, reinforces the meaning/significance established in the introduction, and effectively wraps up the essay.	5	4	3-2	1	0
Research and Citations (40 points)					
Support for Ideas (15 points): Adequate detail and accurate support are provided for each idea introduced. Specific, accurate, and relevant examples are used to show meaning. The essay does not simply make blanket claims without support. Quality sources (credible, accurate, reasonable, supported) are used effectively to enhance the author's ideas.	15-14	13-11	10-7	6-1	0
In-text Citations (10 points): Included for all borrowed material and properly formatted. Each one has a corresponding Works Cited entry. Web addresses and/or links are not acceptable.	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-1	0
Works Cited (15 points): Page is included at end of document. Entries are alphabetized, and each entry has at least one corresponding in-text citation. All entries are correctly formatted according to MLA guidelines.	15-14	13-11	10-7	6-1	0
<i>Continued</i>					

GRADING RUBRIC: EXAM 007130	Exemplary	Proficient	Fair	Poor	Not Shown
Content Requirements (10 points)					
Essay meets basic content specifications. Writing an Editorial —Issue chosen is current, personal connection is explained, editorial approach is taken, informed explanation of issue is offered, informed explanation of proposed solutions is offered, support offered as to how/why solutions can work. Planning a Career —Career choice is clear, personal reasons for choice are explained, details about career (training/education/certification, events of a day or week, current salary/financial outlook, impact of geography) are offered, explanation given regarding how/why career choice is a good fit.	10–9	8–7	6–5	4–1	0
MLA Formatting (5 points)					
Heading (1 point): Included and correctly formatted. Must appear left-justified on first page ONLY and include full name, student number, and exam number.	1	*	.5	*	0
Running Header (1 point): Included and correctly formatted. Begins on page two and includes student's last name and page number ONLY.	1	*	.5	*	0
Titles (2 points): Both title of essay and title of works cited page are included and properly formatted. Must be centered and in same font as rest of essay. Neither is bolded, italicized, quoted, or underlined.	2	*	1	*	0
Double Spacing and Indenting (1 point): Entire paper is double spaced. Paragraphs are indented. Block paragraphing is not allowed.	1	*	.5	*	0
Totals					

SAMPLE PAPER

A sample paper is provided on the following page. Review the paper before submitting your paper for grading. The sample paper has examples of in-text citations and contains a Works Cited page. These items are essential for a research paper. Without these items, you'll start off with a grade that is below passing.

Student Name: John Doe 1

Student Number: 12345678

Exam Number: XXXXXX

Scranton's Tax System 2

I have always had to drive a good distance to work. The average commute last year was about 26 minutes 3 (Cortes and Jarosz), which is about the same as what I have been driving over my 10 years of working full time. Each experience of commuting was very different, including the types of roads and travel time. However, each of the places I worked felt like a community of workers, where we worked towards common goals to make the community a better place. That almost changed, though, with the commuter tax that was proposed in July of 2014 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. 4

Although I think the law itself was misguided and unfair, the idea behind the tax is a good one. Pennsylvania Act 205, the act Mayor Courtright used to justify the new tax, would allow the city to use new measures to strengthen local pensions for retired city workers. Mayor Courtright stated, "the money will go directly to the pensions. We can't use it for anything other than the pensions" (Deabill). 5 The other local taxes, most notably property taxes, go towards public services. From the city's point of view, adding a greater burden to Scranton residents would be unfair, since commuters benefit from those services, such as police protection and fire prevention services. Residents of Scranton do already pay the third highest wage tax in the state as well, so why increase that burden? After all, a community sense of sharing burdens is an ideal that has historically helped America to grow and prosper (Lockwood). 6

A group of commuters challenged the law in state court. A near-by mayor, Alexander Chelick, explained the frustrations of commuters, like me, stating "employees are going to have to pay for parking, they're going to have to pay a commuter tax" (Deabill). The greater point was also that taxes were being levied on people who had no power to affect the

1
Create a header and place it in the upper-left hand corner of your paper.

2
Center the title of your paper. Use double spacing throughout your paper.

3
Specific information taken from an outside source. The information is followed by an in-text citation, which is used to provide the source

4
The first paragraph is the introduction. It establishes the topic which is commuting to another community to work and the proposal in that community for commuters to pay a tax. The writer draws the reader's attention by getting the reader to want to learn more about the commuter tax.

5
Notice how the in-text citation comes after the quotation marks, but before the end punctuation.

6
This in-text citation relates to the information that comes after the previous in-text citation.

Create a running header on the second page of the paper. The header needs to include your last name and the appropriate page number.

8

In this paragraph, the author described the commuter's challenge in court and the outcome of the challenge. The paragraph has good flow.

9

The author starts a new paragraph when he introduces another main idea.

10

The author provides a personal example in this paragraph.

11

This is a specific reference to an outside source. This requires that the source be cited on the Works Cited page.

local government through their votes, since people who do not live in Scranton are not part of its elections. The court's decision, written by Judge Braxton, based in Philadelphia, came about 12 hours before the new tax was set to be implemented (Lockwood). The judge ruled the state law that gave Scranton the power to create the tax was used incorrectly because an unfair burden was placed on commuters by the city, and it is against the state Constitution to set tax a certain segment of the population (Lange).⁸

⁹ From the beginning, various commuters argued that the city was downplaying the effect commuters have on its economy, even though we do only come to the city for work. As someone who works in the city, I also use my money in Scranton. There is a grocery store nearby for quick shopping after work, and there are fast-food restaurants for quick consumption and gas stations for when a fill-up will get me home again. Commuter usage of these services helps the local economy, which continues to benefit the city (Horstmann).

¹⁰ Earlier this year, the city exercised its rights under Pennsylvania Act 47, which allows cities categorized as economically distressed to triple what is called the local services tax, or LST (Lockwood). This new strategy added additional taxes to all people who work in the city (residents and commuters alike), instead of just those who travel into the city to work. A judge reviewed the plan and agreed with the city that the plan was permissible and the state act was constitutional (Lockwood). The plan has also not been as widely condemned as the original commuter tax because it does seem much fairer. Some business owners and groups are critical of the size of the tax increase, however, and are concerned about how it will affect people's desire to work in and ability to spend money in the city.

In all, I do think that this new plan is part of a better, more balanced approach by the city. The city can create new revenues with tax increases and through other, more creative avenues. Tim Horstmann, a Pennsylvania attorney, does ref-

erence that the city of Allentown (in a similar situation) set up a long-term lease for its water and sewer system in order to raise money to help alleviate that city's debts. As we can see from this example, more creative solutions do exist.

Cost cutting can be a painful part of governing, but it is required to create stable economic footing. The groups who represent workers in the city should be willing to come to the table to work with the city on these costs. Local services and personnel may also have to be cut to ensure that the city is able to meet its obligations. Personnel cuts can come in the form of cuts to salaries or benefits, or, in some extreme cases, complete elimination of positions.

12 It is important that the city of Scranton gets its funding right. Many people depend on the stability of the city for security as current residents and workers and future retirees. The city has an obligation to respect the social contract it has created with its residents. The social contract with commuters must also be respected, because we all want to feel like we are part of the city we work in, even if we do not live here. There is nothing wrong trying something new; however, the commuter tax would have created an "us vs. them" mentality among residents and commuters. Since that did not work, new ideas were needed. Hopefully these new ideas will lead to better days in the city, allowing the feeling of community to flourish once again.

12

The author provides a solid conclusion. The author states his position on how the city should deal with its financial issues. He explains why the commuter tax was the wrong approach.

13

The Works Cited page must start on its own page. The title of the page should be centered.

13

Works Cited

14

Cortes, Rachel and Beth Jarosz. "In the US, New Data Show Longer, More Sedentary Commutes." *PRB.com*. Population Reference Bureau, September 2014. Web. 10 June 2015.

14

The Works Cited page needs to be alphabetical.

15

Deabill, Eric. "Scranton Commuters Could Face New Tax to Help City." *pahomepage.com*. WBRE, 16 July 2014. Web. 10 June 2015.

15

List the title of the article, so it can be located by the reader.

Hortsmann, Tim. "Where Do We Go From Here: Scranton Commuter Tax Scrapped." *municipalrecoverylaw.com*. 16 McNees Municipal Law Recovery, 10 Oct. 2014. Web. 10 June 2015.

16

If you're using a website as a source, be sure to list the title of the article and not just the website.

Lange, Stacy. "Judge Strikes Down Scranton Commuter Tax Plan." *wnep.com*. WNEP, 30 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 June 2015.

17

Lockwood, Jim. "Scranton Gets Its Day In Court for Tax Hike." *Scranton Times* [Scranton, PA] 20 April 2015 morning ed.: A2. Print. 18

17

Notice the structure of the date. (Day/Month/Year)

18

This reference indicates the writer used the printed version of the paper as opposed to the web version.