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Essay #1: Taking a Position on Food
Due by 11:59pm on Sunday April 23rd

We manipulate the planet and all of its creatures. We create, we consume, we build, and we destroy, but how often do we consider the processes and people that provide unceasingly for our unquenchable appetites? How often do we consider the consequences? This essay asks that you consider the inner (and outer) workings of the US food system and then take a position on a narrowed down aspect of it.

During this project we might ask ourselves any combination of the following: *where does our food come from, and at what cost? How have our foods been processed, conceived, even constructed, and then shipped and stored? How do we treat the animals we eat? How should we treat them? How are they killed? How conscious are we of the world we are taking from every single day? Where do we fit in? What do we have to say?*

To accomplish your task, you will be using pairings of articles I provide in order to take part in an ongoing conversation about food. These readings will require you to look closely at what we eat and how our consumption shapes the world, in both positive and negative ways.

You will need to first consider our relationship with food and the consequences of our eating habits, on individuals, societies, and the planet that we share, then narrow down your focus to an individual and focused topic/idea, which you will then research independently so that you might enter into a scholarly conversation. The goal of this essay is to either make your own claim about your subject, or to support an already established claim with rational and logical reasons and evidence in order to convince your reader to take up the same position that you hold.

This essay need not be a soapbox for any political agenda; instead, we are looking for a balance in rhetorical strategies. Using ethos, pathos, and logos effectively means respecting all viewpoints while backing up your claims with reputable sources and logical insights/analysis.

In the wise words of Christopher Hitchens: “That which can be asserted without evidence, can be dismissed without evidence.”

While I value each and every one of your opinions, scholarly readers are less forgiving. Imagine your audience to be educated readers who are familiar with the topic and themes we will be exploring. These readers will expect you to back up your claims, and to use reputable sources. See the end of this prompt for paper specifics / requirements.

Reading and Research

I am providing you with a group of food-related readings. Some of the readings will be mandatory, as in I expect everyone to read them and use them in their papers. The others are paired options that you will choose from. Each reading will be labeled on the Module I introduce it as either mandatory or optional. They are also listed at the end of this prompt.

Make sure to take detailed notes of the sources you do read. It is always smart to make sure you can answer the following about your sources:

- Who is the author? What is the author's standing in the field?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the principal conclusion, thesis, contention, or question?
- How is the author's position supported? Does the author consider alternative evidence or explanations?
- How does this source fit into the context of your topic/essay?
- What does this source add to your essay?

Evaluating: How can I assess existing research?

A persuasive essay is never just a list of studies—it's always an argument about a body of research (or it is part of a larger argument). Thus, your essay needs to contain a balance of summary and evaluation.

Summary and Synthesis

In your own words, summarize and/or synthesize key findings relevant to your essay from each of the sources. Consider asking the following questions:

- What are the key arguments, key characters, and key concepts?
- What are the existing debates/theories?

Sample language for summary and synthesis:

- Smith has demonstrated...
- Early work by Jones, Riley, and Graves was concerned with...
- Sanchez and Lee compared results from several studies...

Remember that with synthesis you are looking for intersections and divergences in your research! So you always want to be looking for what your sources have in common, and where they contradict.

Putting it all together

Once you have summarized, synthesized, critiqued and compared your sources, you will want to consider the overall picture that emerges. What kinds of common ideas do you see?

Your essay as a whole should demonstrate both what has been said about your topic and what remains unexplored. After assessing the source, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- Why should I study (further) this research topic/problem?
- What contributions will my analysis make to the existing sources?

Drafting your essay

You will want to consider the following:

- Exigency: explain why your topic is important.
- Introduction/background information: introduce readers to the topic.
- Thesis: offer an argument about the subject/theme you choose to explore.
- Organization: arrange your material in a logical fashion to support your major claim.
- Conclusion: provide closure to your paper (tie things together, restate why it matters).

Do not forget that you must integrate citations smoothly and appropriately into your draft.

Introduction

The main tasks of an introduction are to:

- Hook your reader
- Provide some background to the topic.
- Demonstrate the importance of the topic or the need for more research on the topic.
- Make a claim. **THIS IS YOUR THESIS!** More on that below...

Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement:

1. Offers an argument and critical assessment based on your research (i.e. topic + claim).
2. Provides an overview of the current scholarly conversations about your topic.
3. Points out gaps or weaknesses in the argument (or the opposing argument).
4. Relates the claim to the larger aim of the paper to follow.

Organization

One of the most difficult parts of drafting a persuasive essay is deciding how to organize the information you have accumulated. Organizing your essay according to themes or underlying concepts are possibilities. But really, let your plans for your essay guide you.

Conclusion

The main tasks of a conclusion are to:

- Summarize the main findings of your research.

- Answer the question: So what? (For example, a “clenching statement” such as a warning or a call to action). This is your verbal power pose. Close with confidence.

Citations

Finally, a successful essay will not consist simply of a string of linked quotes or paraphrases. Over reliance on someone else’s words or ideas suggests a “report” instead of an “argument.” Your goal is to synthesize your summary of a source's ideas with your own opinions and comments on the source material.

Basic rule for citation: If it’s not your own idea (and it’s not common knowledge), *cite it!*

Some tips on appropriate citations:

- In general, you should paraphrase (restate in your own words) the author’s ideas. In order to appropriately paraphrase, your sentence cannot replicate the word choice or sentence structure of the original. Paraphrases need parenthetical citation (see MLA “in text citations”).
- Use direct quotations carefully. You may use them to call attention to terms or phrases that have specific resonance, or when the language of the quotation is particularly powerful.
- If you do use a quotation, make sure you introduce the quote and/or explain its significance so that readers understand how the quotation adds to your argument.
- Keep accurate citation records of your sources as you read and compile your notes; this will make your final task of integrating quotations and providing appropriate citations much easier.

Some things to avoid:

Plagiarism: Despite pleasant depictions of home life in art, the fact remains that for most Seventeenth-century Dutch women, *home was a prison, though a prison made bearable by love and approval*. (This writer has lifted the italicized phrase directly from the source; this writer needs to paraphrase the plagiarized phrase, or put it in quotation marks, and cite the author either way.)

Irrelevant quotation: In paintings, images of caged birds were often associated with the bonds of marriage or the voluntary imprisonment of love. Somewhat ironically, Dixon notes that the “image of the fragile, passive, housebound woman has always been a reflection more of male wish fulfillment than of female reality” (3). (This quote has nothing to do with the claim made in the first sentence.)

Un-introduced quotation: In some quarters, Seventeenth-century Dutch women were accorded considerable respect. “Beverwijck solves the dichotomy between the public and private woman’s role by lauding the superior qualities of women that make them not only capable rulers, artists and savants, but also good daughters, wives, and mothers” (Moore, 1994, p. 642). (Although this quote relates to the topic of the paragraph, the author needs to explain this relationship.)

Essay Minimum Requirements:

- 4-6 pages (full pages)
- MLA format (Times New Roman, double spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, etc...)
- Works Cited Page included
- You must have at least 4 sources, 2 of which come from the mandatory class texts and 2 from the paired optional texts**
- **See the rubric for more details on what I want to see on this essay**

Important note:

This is English 103, so I expect you already know and understand how to produce cogent, error-free prose. But I also know that writing is a skill that we are always in the process of developing and some of us are in different places on the path than others. I have a file on the Canvas page called “helpful Handouts” – please use it! I try to always have handouts for the most common areas of struggle (I also use your “reflecting on your writing process” assignment to help me fill this file out). And if there is a handout you would like to see but do not, email me and let me know and I will try to oblige.

** Sources:

1. What You Eat is Your Business – Mandatory
 2. The Food Gap is Widening – Mandatory
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- The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food - Option 1a
 - How Junk Food Can End Obesity Option 1b
 - Why Jonathan Safran Foer Chose to Give Up Meat – Option 2a
 - Ever Wonder If You Could Kill What You Eat – We Did the Other Night – Option 2b
 - Monsanto’s Newest GMO Crops May Create More Problems Than They Solve – Option 3a
 - Scientists Say GMOs Are Safe, Public Skepticism Remains – Option 3b

Remember, four sources for this paper are required, in total. You must use the two listed as mandatory. Additionally, you will choose one of the pairings (1a&b, 2a&b, OR 3a&b) as your other two sources. Research is NOT mandatory for essay 1. You may include some additional research if you wish.



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