

Model Writing Assignment: The Six-Part Paper

In writing intensive courses, I tend to structure my final assignments as multiple-part papers, with parts of the paper that build upon one another and are due every week or two throughout the semester. As students submit the various parts of the paper, I grade these papers and provide them with substantive written feedback and suggestions for revisions. Then, they are tasked with revising their paper as the course proceeds, and these revisions become their final paper in the course. The final paper is one document that contains all revised parts of the paper.

I prefer to run my writing intensive courses this way because I find that students tend to feel a sense of autonomy, ownership and pride in their projects. They choose their own area of focus and then through in-class conversations, I guide them to dig more deeply into their topic through drawing upon a variety of sources (the news, academic articles, and interviews). At the end of the semester, they engage in paper revisions. I find that students tend to appreciate the fact that they are very familiar with the terrain of what revisions need to be done on their writing at this point in the semester, and so the semester has a nice flow as it wraps up. Then, when I receive their final papers, they have clearly noted the revisions that they have made to their ongoing papers, and summarized their revision process for me, making grading somewhat quick and easy to complete.

In what follows, I share with you a model of a six-part research assignment that I use in a 400-level Education course. You may feel free to adapt this assignment, or aspects of it, for your own writing intensive classes.

Issues Paper and Final (60% of grade)

For this assignment, you will choose a topic of focus for the semester. This will be a topic that you will focus in on throughout the entirety of the semester, so you will want to choose a topic that interests you. The topic must be one of the following:

- [List acceptable topics here]

Your final paper for this course consists of six parts (see the table below). These parts will be written one-by one over the course of the semester. Each new part of the paper will be added onto a single running document, which contains a cover page plus all written parts of the paper.

Revisions

I will provide you with feedback on each part of your assignment. My feedback may be found in the rubric on Blackboard. You are responsible for reading this feedback and then revising your paper in accordance with suggestions. Your revisions must be put into RED or PURPLE ink, so that revisions are easy to notice and locate. Meanwhile, you should also make note of the major changes that you made to each part of the paper on a separate document.

Final Paper

At the end of the semester, you will submit all parts of this paper in a single document as the final paper for this course. Remember that your revisions must be marked in RED or PURPLE ink. And you should include a list of the major changes that you made to each part of the paper in the NOTES section on Blackboard.

Assignment stages, points, and due dates:

Assignment stage	Points	Due dates
Research Question	No grade	[date] bring to class
Problem Statement	/5	[date] at midnight
News Articles and Summaries	/5	[date] at midnight
Interviews	/5	[date] at midnight
Literature Review	/5	[date] at midnight
Solutions Paper	/10	[date] at midnight
Final paper	/30	[date] at 8:00am

FINAL PAPER SUBMISSION:

- ☐ All four parts should be put into a single document and submitted to Blackboard by the final due date of [date]. No late papers will be accepted.
- ☐ When you are editing for your final paper submission, then you **MUST** make any changes that you make to sections that have been previously handed in very obvious. Do this by putting **changes in either RED or PURPLE ink**. This way I can identify the changes quickly and easily. You do not need to cross out or indicate where you have deleted text – just delete it.
- ☐ When you submit the assignment, **in the Notes section on Blackboard** you must include a short description of what changes you made to the six sections.
- ☐ The document should be compiled with the papers in the following order: Research question; Problem statement; News articles and summaries; Interviews; Literature review; Solutions paper.
- ☐ Each section of the paper should be clearly labeled using a heading that is in bold and centered. Each section should start on a new page of the document.
- ☐ Be sure to follow the “Guidelines for Written Assignments” instructions in the syllabus. These items include things like font size, typeface, footer, etc.
- ☐ There should be one reference page, which is the final section of the paper. It should be labeled “References.”
- ☐ The final assignment **MUST** include a cover page with the following information:

Final Paper: (fill in your topic of focus)

By: (fill in your name)

Course: (fill in course name and section)

For: (fill in instructor name)

Date: (fill in)

Assignment stage	Points
Research Question	No grade
Problem Statement	(fill in) /5
News Articles and Summaries	(fill in) /5
Interviews	(fill in) /5
Literature Review	(fill in) /5
Solutions Paper	(fill in) /10

Part 1: Research Question
(.25 pages max.)

For this assignment, you will create a question about schooling, based on the topics covered in this course. This question should focus on an issue listed below, or another issue that is approved by your professor and links to course curriculum. A good question for this assignment is open ended, meaning it does **not** have a Yes/No answer.

Issues:

- [List acceptable topics here]

You will receive feedback on this question from other students in this class and/or your professor, either in written or verbal format.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOUR QUESTION CONNECTS DIRECTLY TO THE CONTENT OF THIS COURSE.

Part 2: Problem Statement
(1.5 pages max.)

You are to think about your research question, and then identify what current problems and conflicts connect to this issue in K-12 schooling today. This problem should highlight in greater detail what problem is being explored in this paper. Do not be surprised if, as you write the Problem Statement, you wish to slightly revise your research question.

Be specific in your problem statement about particular areas of contention and conflict that relate to your research question. Describe the problem in depth, including information about the various agents involved or connected to the problem. Be sure to end the problem statement with either a statement of purpose or research question.

You must cite at least two sources from our class in this section, plus two outside sources (news articles or academic articles are both acceptable, provided they are from reputable sources). In total, you must include at least **four sources** in the introduction.

Note:

- ☐ It is a good idea to read about the problem before you write this section of the paper. You will want to understand what the current trends are related to the problem, and get a few different perspectives about it.
- ☐ You are to cite at least **four sources**. Two must be from our class, and two must be from outside sources (news articles or academic articles are both acceptable, provided they are from reputable sources).
- ☐ Be sure to reference all sources using APA format.
- ☐ Include at least *one paragraph* that directly addresses relevant issues of identity and social justice as it relates to the problem.
- ☐ Be sure to follow the “Guidelines for Written Assignments” in your syllabus:

All written assignments must follow these guidelines:

- ☐ Typed in 12 point font; Calibri or Arial font; black ink;
- ☐ Double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides;
- ☐ Numbered pages;
- ☐ Footer with your name;
- ☐ Correct use of APA format (info about APA formatting is on Blackboard);
- ☐ Include a cover page as the first page of your paper with your name, date, title of essay, and the course prefix, number and section;
- ☐ Include a “References” page;
- ☐ Meet the word- or page-limit requirement;
- ☐ Turned in on time: this means before class-time, and/or by the due date

Part 3: News Articles and Summaries
(2.5 pages max.)

You are to identify **five current news articles** and write up **summaries** of their content. The goal is to be informed about what is currently going on in the world, connected to your Problem Statement. Do not be surprised if, as you learn more about the news, you wish to slightly revise your research question and problem statement.

Please follow these steps:

1. Recall your **Problem Statement** for this course.
2. Identify **five news articles** that relate to your Problem Statement. Note the following:
 - Must be published January 2019 or later
 - All articles must be published in a reputable news source (i.e. a local well-known newspaper from your hometown, New York Times, Washington Post, the Atlantic, etc.)
3. Read the articles carefully. Then **write five short summaries** (one for each article).
 - Write .5 page maximum per summary (based on five articles, for a total of 2.5 pages of summaries, double-spaced)
 - Each summary should be in your own words. Be very careful NOT to plagiarize what has already been written!
 - Content of summaries must contain:
 - i. Top of page: Include the correct APA reference citation for the article, which includes the weblink for the article.
 - ii. Paragraph 1: Identify the basic “what, why, when, where, how” of the article. Make sure this is in your own words.
 - iii. Paragraph 2: Point out in your own words why this article is important to teachers, students, families and/or schools. What is significant? Why should we care about this issue?
4. When you edit this for submission double-check the following:
 - ☐ Are your paragraph summaries double-spaced?
 - ☐ Are your paragraph summaries 12-point font?
 - ☐ Are your paragraph summaries in Calibri or Arial font?
 - ☐ Is your reference for the news article in APA format?
 - ☐ Did you include a web link for each article?
 - ☐ Are your summaries for the articles .5 page maximum, each?

Part 4: Interviews
(4 pages max.)

You are responsible for conducting interviews with at least two sources in response to your research question. Do not be surprised if, as you conduct interviews, you wish to slightly revise your research question and problem statement.

Step 1: Carefully choose two people to interview.

- You will want to choose people who can offer some insight into your topic that you hadn't thought of before.
- Please choose two people who either hold very different opinions or ideas, OR two people who hold vastly different positions in relation to your research question. For example, if you are studying teacher unions then you might interview two teachers, one who is strongly in support of their union and another who is very critical. Or, another example is you might interview a teacher union member as well as the local president of a teacher union.

Step 2: Develop an Interview Protocol

- Write up a list of questions that you would like to ask your interviewee before you interview them.
- Test these questions out on a friend, family member or acquaintance beforehand, to see if they work, have a smooth flow, and elicit thoughtful responses.
- Remember that in part you are being graded on the quality of responses, and a good interview requires that you ask thoughtful pre-meditated questions.

Step 3: Conduct the interview.

- Find a time that works for both of you, and run the interview. You should take notes about the responses of your interviewee so that you clearly remember what they say. These notes will not be handed in.

Step 4: Write up your findings.

- Summarize or transcribe what was discussed in a conversation/interview (i.e. with the school principal, teacher, student, parent, etc.). This summary should typically be at minimum 1 page in length per interview.
- Be sure to provide specific information about what was discussed in the conversation/interview.
- After each interview, you are to include one paragraph that is 3-5 sentences in length. The paragraph should clearly highlight: why you chose to interview this person; why what they told you is significant for understanding the complexity of your issue; and any key points that particularly stood out to you.
- Note that your written text for each interview may be maximum 2 pages in length.

Part 5: Literature Review
(2.5 pages max.)

You are to write a review of what the academic literature has stated about your research question. You are to identify five scholarly texts that connect to your research question, and identify what implications they hold for your research question and exploration of your topic of focus this semester. It is important that you read across the five sources to notice trends and then synthesize your discussion of the readings. This means that you should not discuss each reading on its own, but rather notice trends across the literature and then discuss how various sources engage with these trends.

- Step 1: Locate and read three readings that address this issue. You must use at least **five scholarly texts** in total. Note that you must reference [two specific readings from class] as one of the readings. Two of these scholarly readings must be from this course, and three must be outside sources from peer-reviewed academic journals.
- Step 2: Write your outline. Remember that the literature review should synthesize your findings, rather than addressing the readings-one-by-one. This means that you should notice trends across the five sources, and then locate three overall trends in the literature that connects to your research question and problem statement. Each of these trends will then become a body paragraph.
 - The structure of this essay is as follows:
 - Introductory paragraph that contains one sentence: the research question.
 - Body paragraph 1: point, example, explain.
 - Body paragraph 2: point, example, explain.
 - Body paragraph 3: point, example, explain.
 - Conclusion paragraph that sums up/restates in new words argument and supporting points.
- Step 3: Write your essay.
 - **Format:** Be sure to follow “Guidelines for Writing Assignments” (in syllabus). Also be sure to list in-text citations and final reference list in APA formatting (see above for resources).
 - You should always feel free to contact me with any questions or problems as you prepare the essay, though *I will only offer commentary on draft work that is received during my office hours and received prior to 4:00 PM on Wednesday, April 8, 2019.*

A few other things (that can make our lives easier and grades higher!):

- Point, example, explain! If each paragraph has a clear topic sentence, and is supported by evidence and analysis that ties the evidence back to your thesis overall, you can't go wrong.
- Please do not exceed the page limit. Meeting page limits and being concise is a challenging but important skill to develop as writers.
- Please avoid terms like "I feel" and "I believe." Instead, make sure your writing presents evidence and analysis that makes it clear how you feel and believe and why you feel and believe it.
- Please avoid standalone quotes - e.g. "The unexamined prejudices of the parents are passed onto the children" (Tatum, 2003, p. 7). Instead, provide a simple lead in to do so, e.g. In addressing how racism is learned by new generations, Tatum (2003) states: "The unexamined prejudices of the parents are passed onto the children" (p. 7).
- Please use apostrophes correctly. Here's a great site to refer to when you have questions about apostrophes or many other grammar rules:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/621/01/>

Part 6: Solutions Paper
(4 pages max.)

Write a solutions paper that highlights your perception of the most effective response, or range of responses, to the problem at hand. Your solutions might encompass those geared primarily toward teachers, parents, students, school administrators, community members, policy makers – or a combination thereof.

The solutions should be tangible and specific – meaning, they should be solutions that real people are able to implement, and they should be specific enough to provide a framework or step-by-step approach. This means that you should not develop solutions that are vague or lack specificity and substance. Your reader should be able to imagine, alongside you, what the solution would look like, feel like, and have a sense for how leaders might institute this solution.

This solution paper should reference at least three academic sources and three news-related sources. You may reference those sources cited in the News Summaries and Literature Review assignments, or you may choose new sources to focus on in the solutions section. It is up to you. Please be sure to reference all sources in a References section at the end of the paper.

Please structure this section in a way that makes it easy for the reader to locate the solutions that you are proposing. You might either open paragraphs with phrases like: “The first proposed solution is...”. Or, you might include subtitles within this section that clearly outline the proposed solution (for examples, your first subtitle might be: Solution #1: Create More Opportunities for Teacher Involvement in their Union).