Treatment for Assignment Finding a story

# Introduction:

This assignment represents the first small step in what will eventually be your final paper for this class. That final paper represents a culmination of both our examination of the use of sources and our exploration of the role of writing in our lives as well. This time, however, you get to choose the subject you will explore and the discourse community you describe. And going even further, you will then not only take your place within the conversation of this discourse community, but reflect upon the very nature of discourse community itself. The University of Texas at El Paso defines discourse community as

a social group that communicates, in part, using written texts but also shares common goals, values, writing standards, specialized vocabulary, and specialized genres. As we have learned, writing is a social act—an act of connecting with others for multiple purposes.

The discourse community is the group discussing the subject you are interested in: this is where the conversation is happening. Or, to fit in with another course theme, you could say that this group is telling stories—forming narratives—about some topic or issue. Bringing together the various threads of this course, your job in the assignment will be to identify this narrative, enter into this conversation by making an argument of your own, and reflecting upon the nature of the discourse community that is discussing your topic.

I have been mentioning this assignment since the beginning of class to give you time to think about what you might want to write about. I believe that allowing you to write about a subject that matters to you personally will help you produce your more vigorous and exciting writing.

# Understanding a Treatment:

I call this step a treatment, which is a term I borrow from the entertainment industry. In film and television, a treatment is a short prose summary of a story you are hoping to develop into a script. For our purposes, I see this as a preliminary draft of your final paper in which you explain what subject you want to write about, what you personally want to say about this subject, and a preliminary list of sources. To do all this , follow these steps.

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## Subject.

Start researching and find a subject you are interested in. This should be something you want to learn more about and which about which you have something to say. Note: you don’t need to have an argument or opinion right away: this will come in time as you continue your research.

## Find the Story.

As H. Porter Abbott and many others have argued, narratives are fundamental to human perception and understanding (see *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* in the supplemental discussion unit). We use stories to organize experience and make sense of the world, and so you can find stories everywhere, not just in English class, Video games, and movies. As you explore you subject look for some issue that is being debated or topic that is being explored. Centering around these points, you should be able to find some story or narrative that are being constructed. In class, I have often used the debate on fracking as an example. If you are against this procedure, you would point out how fracking leads to poisoned water supplies, health problems, and economic devastation caused by sink holes, etc. If you are for fracking, your article will talk about how this procedure leads to economic prosperity, and how it will strengthen the nation by providing additional energy supplies. Keep in mind, that the authors of these kinds of articles probably are not aware of the fact they are telling stories (and in fact they would probably be offended by the suggestion that this is what they are doing). In their minds, they are writing serious non fictional studies, not spinning yarns. But we can notice how in each case a kind of narrative is being constructed that starts with them drilling in the ground: in one case this is a story with a happy ending with people getting jobs and sharing wealth, and with the nation wrapping itself in the mantle of energy security. On the other side, this is a tragedy, with shortsighted greed leading to ruin, environmental devastation, and as in all great tragedies, even death. What you need to do is find the story in your subject: what narrative is being constructed to explain something or show the consequences of some action.

## Entering the conversation.

Tel me what you want to say about your topic. Of necessity, this will be provisional and tentative, but you should try to articulate what your own focus, your own argument will be.

Again, I understand that this will not yet be fully formed, and it is OK if your point changes over time, but it will help you if you start trying to define your focus.

## Sources.

As I mention above, I am requiring you to use published scholarly sources. I will point out that a vast majority of the sources you use will probably be journal articles. When you are searching the databases, look for articles in what are called either peer reviewed or academic journals (some of you might also use books published by academic presses, but these are not as common). You should use the library databases instead of just doing a Google search, for most of the academic citations are in proprietary databases, and you might not be able to either find them or gain access to them through Google or other search engines. A database I most frequently recommend to students is called Academic Search Elite

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I don’t have a requirement for the number of sources you list in the treatment, but for the final draft you will be required to use at least four scholarly publications. That, of course, is just a minimum number, and depending upon your topic, you might need to use more. Furthermore, in addition to your core of scholarly sources, you might be able bring in other kinds of sources as well—indeed some subjects invite this approach. If this is your situation, contact me, and we will discuss it together. Every essay is a little different, so I would like to handle this on a case by case basis. However, I will point out that one concern I have is to make sure you are not over relying on the nonstandard sources: even if you are bringing in other kinds of material, your main focus should still be on the academic sources.

# Writing your treatment:

I have given you a lot of information here because I want you to go into this having a full understanding of what the final paper is all about, but what you will be doing here for the treatment is actually quite easy. To put this all together, write a 1-2 page document in which you give me a quick overview of what you will be trying to say. First, tell me about the subject you are interested in, then identify the particular issue or question that you want to focus on, describe the story you see here, and explain what your own argument is going to be. And of course, you should also list a few of the sources you are considering using. This is just a preliminary list, and these will probably change before you are done, but I want to see what kinds of sources you are finding. Please note: **do not give me links**, but write up complete, formal works cited entries following the MLA format.

# Additional Requirements:

Like all of our formal assignments**,** your paper must follow the format of double space type, standard 12 pt fonts, numbered pages, etc. Look at this carefully.

To reiterate a point I make above: write out the works cited references for your sources. I am chary of following links, and I need the full information to evaluate your sources. And in any case, you will need to do this for the final draft anyhow. So, for instance, for a journal article, you should tell me the title and author of the article itself, the title of the journal it is published in, the volume/ issue number, date, and page numbers.

Length: The treatment can be short: one page or two at the most.