

Unit 1: The Personal Experiment and the Research Essay

Goals of this unit:

1. construct cogent, logical, effective, and ethical arguments in writing;
2. compose texts that effectively employ the features of a given genre;
3. identify reliable and appropriate sources;
4. integrate appropriate sources effectively and ethically in their own texts;
5. participate effectively in groups with an emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding; and
6. compose texts that effectively address audience, purpose, style, and content. (This includes clear focus, structurally unified development of ideas, appropriate rhetorical style, correct use of Standard American Academic English (SAAE), and ethically appropriate use of research.)

Purpose: In 1301, you examined how different groups of people communicate with each other. You examined one genre in one community, one genre from three communities, and you completed your semester by analyzing the rhetorical choices published authors make. Now, it is time for you to join a conversation in your field of study by creating your own research on a topic that interests you. Joining a conversation partially means that you have knowledge to add on a specific topic. This knowledge, then, is the knowledge that you create through an experiment and using existing research on the topic. This project allows you to design your own experiment and then write up the results of your experiment in combination with others' research. Your task for this project is to demonstrate a combination of personal and academic styles with a research paper to communicate the findings of your experiment. Your purpose for this essay is to communicate the findings of your experiment as they fit into the existing research available in the field.

Audience: Your audience for this essay will be those in the field for which your experiment brings new information.

Nuts and Bolts: You will select a topic that interests you not only on an academic level but on a personal level as well. The topic you select must include some kind of border, defined as any border—physical and literal or metaphorical and ideological boundaries between two places. Think about the questions you have about this topic: What do you want to know about it? Your task is to develop a researchable question, then design an experiment in an attempt to answer your question. Then, you will research the conclusions you drew from your experiment to see what others who have researched the same topic have to say about it.

Your experiment must be safe, healthy, and legal and should not have a negative impact on you, your schoolwork, or those around you. You also must have an experiment that only involves you (no outside people can participate in the experiment). The experiment should last 3-5 days. **You cannot use an experiment from another class for this project.** You will take the results of your personal experiment, research the outcomes or conclusions of others' research, and synthesize them into a thesis-driven research paper. Your aim is to draw a conclusion, a claim, about the topic of your choice and use sources to support that claim.

Here are some examples to help clarify. Perhaps you want to know if working out for 30 minutes every morning affects your mood for the day. The border here is the border between health benefits of being physically active and being a couch potato: Do you identify as an active person or a lazy person? This experiment could help you better understand how physical activity influences your self-image. You would develop a research question (i.e. does physical activity for 30 minutes every day boost my self-esteem?) and an experiment where you wake up 30 minutes earlier each day for 5 days to work out. Then, you will record your exercise schedule and note how you felt during the day and your productivity levels throughout the day.

You could also experiment with crossing into a border that you have wanted to cross. For example, you could dye your hair pink to see what reactions you get—or you could dress in clothing that is not your typical style to see how those around you react or to discover how you feel about yourself in this new identity. You could also explore whether or not you read more effectively and efficiently if you have a cup of coffee. Maybe you want to discover the types of music that help you study best. Perhaps you want to teach your dog new tricks or teach yourself a new skill, like using YouTube videos to learn to play the piano, crossing the border into dog trainer or concert pianist.

The options for you are endless, and the choice is yours to make as long as you are safe and establish solid research protocols and include the idea of borders. You will more than likely need to research different methods of uncovering your experiment design. There are loads of them on the internet.

Things to keep in mind while designing your experiment:

- What is your purpose?
- What do you really want to know?

Things to keep in mind when writing it up:

- Who is your intended audience? How do you know? How does this affect the rhetorical choices you employ in your essay?
- How much information or definitions will you need to present so that your readers clearly understand your point?
- What rhetorical choices will you make to persuade your audience that they should believe you and your findings? Why?

You will be required to maintain a research journal, where you will take detailed notes: you will need them to write your essay as they are evidence for the findings of your experiment.

Each day of your experiment, you will answer these questions in your research journal:

- ✓ How did the experiment go today? Were there positive, negative or neutral consequences? How did others react?
- ✓ Have you observed anything yet that helps to answer your original research question? If so, what?
- ✓ What challenges did you face today regarding the experiment? How did you overcome these challenges?
- ✓ What emotional reactions did you have about your experiment?

- ✓ What questions have arisen because of your experiment? Can you keep these as possible research questions to start from? Can you use these as places for future research?
- ✓ What do you need to know more about? Where can you go to find out more? What kind of journals or other research materials might help you to find out more?

Once you have completed your personal experiment and revised your research questions about your topic in light of your experimental findings, you will write a research paper to report your findings.

Parameters: The research essay should be about 1000-1200 words (about 5 ½ pages) and should include specific, cited examples from your experiment and at least two (2) peer-reviewed sources in MLA format. In addition, your essay should be written with an eye toward academic tone, voice, and Standard Academic American English. In addition, your essay should be free of grammatical errors.

TurnItIn Submissions and Deadlines:

Draft 1 DUE: Thursday, February 18 by the START of class

Peer Review 1 DUE: Thursday, February 18 by 11:59 PM

Draft 2 DUE: Tuesday, February 23 by the START of class

Peer Review 2 DUE: In class by the end of class

Final Draft DUE: Thursday, February 25 by 11:59 PM

Features of the Genre: This genre does not use the second-person pronoun (you, your) nor first-person pronouns (I, we, us, our). Your experience should be revealed using third-person (he, she, it, they). You should have your research paper divided into sub-sections with appropriate section headers. Each section should be focused around only that component but should connect to the other sections as well as your controlling idea, making the research you present clear, cohesive, and easy to follow.

- ❖ *Introduction:* You will have an introduction that reviews the available research on the topic and places your experimental findings in context with the current research (meaning the introduction connects what you discovered in your experiment with the findings of others).
- ❖ *Literature Review:* This literature review does not use sources that define words or that tangentially connect to your ideas (although those sources can be included). Instead, this literature review includes peer-reviewed sources that have research findings that support your findings. This review should logically lead to your argument, and your thesis statement should be clear and direct and should come in a thesis paragraph or at the end of your literature review.
- ❖ *Materials Used/Experiment Design:* You will also need to explain the experiment to your readers by including a brief section that states the materials used and the experiment design. This means that you will walk readers through how you conducted your experiment. Remember, omit “I” and “you” and other personal pronouns. This is a little tricky in this section, so pay special attention to how you describe your experiment.

- ❖ *Findings*: You also need a section to report your findings and analyze those findings by explaining to your readers the significance of what your experiment discovered.
- ❖ *Conclusion*: In the final section of your essay, you will present your conclusions about the research. In this section, you will explain to readers why your findings are significant and how they add knowledge to the field. This is where you really enter that conversation by adding your research to the existing research. This means that you will need to bring your conclusions of your experiment back into context with the existing research. In addition, conclusions to research essays answer three questions:
 - Did I do what I said I would do? In other words, did you present enough evidence to support the argument that you made? This is more than a mere recitation of your thesis.
 - Why is this important? This question moves your research beyond our classroom walls. What is the significance of your argument?
 - What do you want readers to do with this information? You are the expert on this area and you need to tell readers what they should do with the knowledge that you have given them. In a research paper this often means that you will tell researchers what further research should be conducted and why.

A few reminders about paragraph structure:

1. You should have a topic sentence that includes a transition and overviews the focus of the paragraph as it connects to your controlling idea.
2. You should then expand on your controlling idea, describing how this idea (or section) furthers your controlling idea.
3. Give examples to which the audience can relate.
4. Synthesize your outside sources with your ideas.
5. Discuss how the source helps you demonstrate the section focus.
6. Finish the paragraph with a sentence that connects the section back to your controlling idea.

Steps:

1. Choose a topic that is of importance to you
2. Determine what you want to know about the topic: Turn this into a research question
3. Determine what experiment would produce the best set of data for you to analyze
4. Plan your research project
5. Write in your journal every day of your experiment, taking as detailed of notes as possible
6. At the end of your experiment, determine what claim you can make (in other words, formulate an answer to the research question you started with)
7. Organize your ideas around your controlling idea/claim (the answer to your research question)
8. Decide what evidence you have from your experiment and from outside sources that best demonstrates your claim
9. Write a rough draft of the research paper
10. Go see your professor or the Writing Center if you are struggling
11. Actively engage in the writer's workshop
12. Make changes based upon the information in the workshop

13. Go see your professor or the Writing Center if you are struggling
14. Attend the peer review workshop
15. Make changes based upon feedback from workshop
16. Go see your professor or the Writing Center if you are struggling
17. Edit and proofread
18. Hand in Unit 1 essay and reflection

To earn the minimum grade of a C, your essay must...

1. Be in MLA format
2. Have been peer reviewed in workshops
3. Meet the page requirements
4. Have a controlling idea (claim) with evidence from the experiment and outside sources that supports it
5. Be cohesive and organized around your controlling idea
6. Be specific and give details and examples
7. Be handed in on time along with the reflection