**The AP English Language and Composition Research Argumentative/Synthesis Essay**

**The Rationale**: Many college courses require you to submit a major research project, a term paper. Therefore, the knowledge of the research process and paper development can be an invaluable tool for success after high school. Furthermore, research and citation processes may be addressed on the AP exam. Finally, this particular assignment will address 2 major writing modes: the argument and the synthesis essay.

**The Assignment**: You will demonstrate your understanding of argument and the research process by submitting a 1200-word (minimum) **argumentative** research paper, written in MLA format\*, on a topic of your choice related to a Supreme Court case or U.S. Constitution / Bill of Rights. You will adhere to the MLA style with proper citations, provide an Annotated Bibliography with a minimum of 20 **credible** entries, and a "Works Cited" page. In the final essay, you will cite at least 6-8 credible sources: at least (1) visual argumentative text, a mix of books, Internet, and "other" – scholarly journals, academic periodicals, etc. At least (1) cited source will be directly related to a Supreme Court case(s). You will process your working drafts and final draft through Turnitin.com before submission in hard copy. (\*Consult the website Purdue OWL for MLA specifics and sample essays.)

**The Method**: We will approach the research process in stages, and you will be required to submit, subject to assessment and grading, **evidence** of the successful completion of certain stages. Due dates for certain stages will be announced on my web page and in class. We will devote a portion of each class period to the discussion of research methods and techniques, citation, plagiarism, and paper formulation and organization.

**Researched Argument/Synthesis Paper**

After you have read and analyzed a number of sources representing a range of viewpoints on your topic, you will enter the conversation by taking a position and formulating an argument in defense of that position, drawing upon the words and ideas—the arguments—of the authors that you have studied to develop and support your own point of view. Your ideas, opinion, and voice should dominate the essay. Your sources should be used to support and inform, but should not overwhelm your own ideas.

**PROCEDURE**

**Step 1: Select a topic about which there is debate in the field.**

**Step 2: PRE-RESEARCH - Generate questions:** Make a list of at least ten questions about your topic. Sort the questions into those that have fact-based answers, and those whose answers are a matter of opinion. Ultimately you are to formulate at least three philosophical questions about your topic that you hope to answer for yourself through research. These are big-idea questions that not only prompt opposing opinions and viewpoints but also whose answer has ethical or moral implications.

* Evidence – (10) researchable questions, narrowed to 5, then 1, based on preliminary research.

**Step 3: Focus/take a position**

Choose one of the questions to tackle in your research. Revise the question for clarity. Answer the question based on a survey of credible sources (working thesis).

* Evidence: One researchable question and preliminary (working) thesis / claim. (PRE-RESEARCH WORKSHEET)

**Step 4: RESEARCH - Become informed.**

Ask, “What factual information or data do I need in order to inform my opinion?” Develop a set of fact-based questions whose answers will inform your position. This set of questions should be comprehensive. Consider what you already know (for sure), what you think you know, and what you need to know. Do you need to know the history of the debate? Definitions of terms related to the topic? What data has been collected? And so on.

* Evidence: Annotated Bibliography with 20 sources and a minimum of 60 notecards

**Step 5: Consider Various Arguments.**

Read several articles or essays (one of which must be an image-based text) collectively representing a range of viewpoints in answer to your focus question. At first, read more than the required number of texts in order to give yourself an accurate sense of the discourse you are about to enter. From your reading, choose texts that, still representing various viewpoints, you find interesting and worthy of deeper analysis. Complete an analysis (Annotated Bibliography) of each of the texts. As you do the analyses, you will begin to perceive more clearly your own point of view and more confidently your own point of entry into the conversation.

* Evidence: Rogerian argument; Annotated Bibliography containing at least 20 credible sources.

**Step 6: Refine your position**

Based on your research, answer your philosophical question. In a sentence of two, articulate your point of view as you might in a thesis statement.

* Evidence: Working thesis (revised according to evidence)

**Step 7: Enter the conversation with the authors.**

Imagine presenting your position to each of the authors you have read. Would he or she agree with you? Disagree? Want to modify or qualify your position?

* Evidence: Mid-Research Reflection form

**Step 8: Clarify your position.**

Based on these imagined conversations, clarify your position such that it will work as a strong thesis statement. Ultimately, your position should be your own, but it should be informed by your research.

* Evidence: Typed statement that will serve as the main idea/thesis of your argument/synthesis research essay, and **working topic outline**.

**Step 9: Select your evidence**

Identify the excerpts and passages that you will use to support your position. Which texts/excerpts will you use as direct affirmation of your position, and which will you use as indirect affirmation by exposing flaws in counter arguments?

* Evidence: Working Sentence (formal) Outline (check-in)

**Step 10: Write, peer-edit, edit, revise your drafts and “Works Cited” page, according to the assignment:**

The paper is to be a 1200-word (minimum) argumentative /synthesis research essay, in which you present and defend your position on the topic. You must cite at least 10 sources in developing your argument. Your argument **must** present and refute counter arguments found in your sources, and it must take into account the sources of the texts you cite as a factor in the viewpoints they put forth.

* Evidence: Peer Review form; sentence outline & drafts with visible revisions, final draft Annotated Bib & Works Cited page

Adapted by D. Douglas, and thanks to Rolf Gunnar and Mary Paine 2008 from David Jolliffe’s (University of Arkansas) *Six Moves Toward Success*

**Diction and Tone**

* The argumentative/synthesis essay is a formal, academic paper. As a result the tone should be elevated, not sounding casual, off-hand or conversational.
* Contractions or speech simulation should not appear in the paper unless you are quoting someone else.
* You should state whatever it is you have to say with conviction, and never leave any doubt in the reader's mind that you believe fully in the conclusion that you have drawn.
* Phrasing such as “I believe” or “I think” signifies that you lack conviction and should be avoided. Illogical shifting of point of view or the use of the colloquial "you" (second person) should also be strictly avoided.
* Once again, this assignment requires the writer to produce a **formal** paper. Tone and diction should always reflect this. You must use sophisticated vocabulary to help establish your credibility.

**Syntax**

* Use **rhetorical strategies** to convey your points in a meaningful, convincing way.
* Use rhetorical appeals in a balanced way to enhance your argument and draw in your audience.
* Use academically mature sentence structure (minimal simple sentences).
* Use **parallelism** throughout, especially with your thesis statement.

**FINAL DRAFT GENERAL MLA REQUIREMENTS (see Purdue OWL for comprehensive list)**

* **Times New Roman Size 12 font;**
* **Double-spaced;**
* **1” margins all sides;**
* **Typed, one side of paper only**
* **Last name, page numbers upper right corners (see example)**
* **1200 words minimum (about 5-6 pages)**
* **Annotated Bibliography (MLA)**
* **Works Cited alphabetized and indented;**

*See AP 9-point rubrics – Argumentative & Synthesis – to follow.*