

Crime Research Project: English 101

Points: approximately 150 (15% of your grade, adjustments to points to be made at the end of the semester)

Crime Research Project Overview

To begin, you will identify a crime/event that intrigues or troubles you for its historical significance, its cultural relevance, or simply because certain questions have been left unanswered or unasked. The event must be considered a legal crime, one in which the perpetrator(s) was identified and one for which there is sufficient evidence and information, from both primary and secondary sources.

You will reconstruct this crime in original, narrative form using multiple reliable sources, (i.e. The assassination of Lincoln, Columbine Shooting, "Slender Man" Stabbing, Andrea Yates' infanticide, etc...this should NOT include serial killers, since those crimes involve multiple "crimes." This should be a one-time event). This project combines the genres of reporting, narration, analysis of cause and effect, process, and reflection. Some questions to address: What happened? Are there many versions of what happened? What were the motives? What are the complications? What have been the effects of this crime and what cultural analyses have been applied to this event? What might we learn from this crime?

Identifying your Research Questions:

Conducting research is really about finding answers to satisfy our curiosity and following the "information trails" that are created when we ask one question which then leads to another question and so on. However, before you delve into the particulars of the case, make sure take some time to really think about what aspects of this case intrigue you the most. It is VERY important that you begin with specific questions to guide your research, otherwise you will soon find yourself mired in information quicksand and overwhelmed with a myriad of facts and theories about the case. After reading the facts about your case, take some time to think about it. What haunts you the most about this case? What do you want to know more about? Are you most intrigued by a lack of evidence? Are you infuriated by the fact that an all-white jury convicted a black man? From a psychological perspective, do you wonder what was happening inside those girls' heads who lured their classmate into the woods for their own entertainment? Or why were supposedly nice, middle-classed teenage girls drawn to a violent man like Charles Manson, to the point where they agreed to commit horrific crimes for him? Or, how in the world did Kip Kinkel's parents miss the "red flags"? We might ask any number of questions for any given event, but the best research papers will attempt to answer questions. The best research questions will not have obvious answers. The best research questions will go beyond mere facts and lead us into debatable or controversial questions that might be harder to prove. In the end, your research paper is your record. It is your best attempt at answering those question that you posed in the beginning.

Specifications:

8 sources, minimum. Information should be a mix of primary and secondary sources. This includes documents such as diaries and journals, court transcripts, police reports, expert testimony, recorded or transcribed confessions and interviews, photographs, etc. Secondary sources include writing by professional journalists and experts in which they interpret and analyze primary source materials,

usually books and articles in periodicals, including newspaper and journal articles, academic/professional film documentaries.

(Unacceptable sources are television/gory crime websites—these are considered tertiary sources that piece together the crimes for sensationalistic purposes often to entertain and to sell a product. These sources are not always bad or necessarily unreliable (though they may be) but are best to avoid for a serious academic investigation.)

Length 8 pages-10 pages, plus additional pages for your Works Cited list. Must include at least two visuals (photos, charts, or graphs) with attention to formatting and audience (please nothing too gory). Please do not use a cover page.

DUE DATE: DECEMBER 4th

Extra Credit, 10 points: Research Presentation (5 minutes maximum. You must create a PowerPoint Slideshow in which you very briefly present the basic facts of the crime and then share with the class the significance of this event.)

Style and Tone: This is an academic research essay for a college-level audience. Your tone should be professional and journalistic since you are reporting information for your audience. It is acceptable to use “I” when necessary. As the writer, you should make an effort to make your essay colorful and interesting. This is a creative project as well as a practical one.

The 20% Rule:

A good guideline to follow is that no more than 20 percent of your paper should be written using direct quotations. For a 10-page paper, this amount totals two pages. The majority of your information should be paraphrased or put into your own words. The reason for this rule is to help writers to avoid the “cut and paste” essay, which essentially not the author’s writing at all. A good rule is to keep all quotations brief, and to only use longer quotations when absolutely necessary—when the writer’s words cannot be changed for the sake of clarity, authority, or style.

MLA

This essay must follow MLA research guidelines. Your essay should contain clear in-text citations as well as a Works Cited list. Any information that you take from an article, website, book, or person must be carefully referenced. Any ideas that are not carefully cited will be considered plagiarized. Please ask me if you have any questions about your citations. Your book has a good section on MLA research papers and plenty of information is available online. It is your responsibility to make sure that your essay adheres to these guidelines.

Suggested Outline and Points to Address

(I encourage you to create your own outline that best suits your topic and your focus):

Background and Introduction (2 pages)

- A. What Happened? Describe the event using creative narrative techniques. Include who, what, and when. (The “why” might come later)
- B. Your Research Question(s): What answers do you hope to find?
- C. What was going on? Historical Context: What is happening politically, socially, at this time? What is the world that surrounds the crime and how might these events have influenced the event?
- D. Legal aspects of the case? How was the crime discovered? Who was charged and with what specific crimes were they charged? How did they plead? What evidence was found? What are the complications of this case?

Body (4-6 pages)

- E. Motives and Causes: Why did this happen?
(Here is where you explain your question/s and the answers you found)

Conclusions (2 pages)

- F. Analysis and your theories:
 - A. Social analysis: What does this crime say about our society? Have there been other crimes like it? Can you give any statistics to show how common this type of crime is?
 - B. Cultural analysis: What cultural forces might have influenced it? Music? Movies? The media? What do experts say about this type of crime? What do musicians and filmmakers say about their influences? For example, what does Marilyn Manson say to the fact that teen shooters have cited his music amongst their favorites?
 - C. Justice: Was justice served? Did the punishment fit the crime? Does our criminal justice system know how to handle these types of crimes?
 - D. Prevention: What did we learn from this? Were any laws, policies, or changes made as a result of this crime? What arguments or recommendations might you make based on your research?