Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Oct 1st, 5:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Fighting Professor Boredom and the Student's Narrow Scope: A Strategy for More Varied and Interesting College Freshmen Papers

Randy Howe
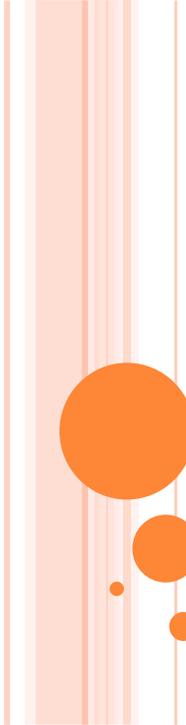*Fitchburg State Collge*

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gaintlit

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Information Literacy Commons

FIGHTING PROFESSOR BOREDOM AND THE STUDENT'S NARROW SCOPE: A STRATEGY FOR MORE VARIED AND INTERESTING COLLEGE FRESHMEN PAPERS

Randy Howe
Communications Media Department
Fitchburg State University

Georgia Conference on Information Literacy
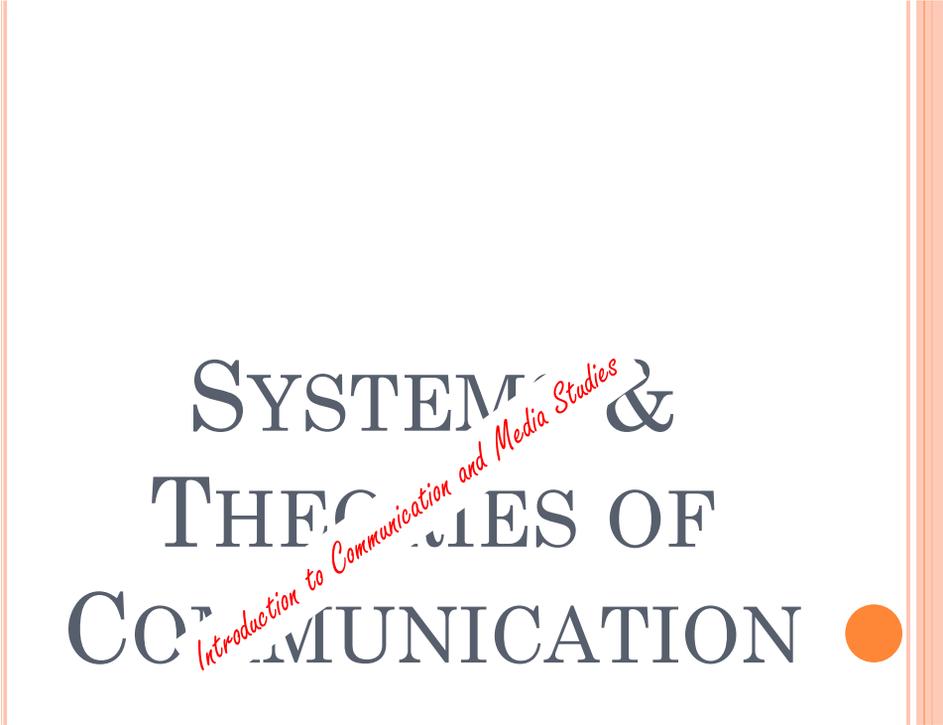
SYSTEMS & THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION

Introduction to Communication and Media Studies

OPEN-ENDED PAPERS ASSIGNED IN 2003 LED TO PAPERS ON SIMILAR THEMES

- Disney
- Bill Gates
- George Lucas
- Media Violence
- MP3/P2P Networks
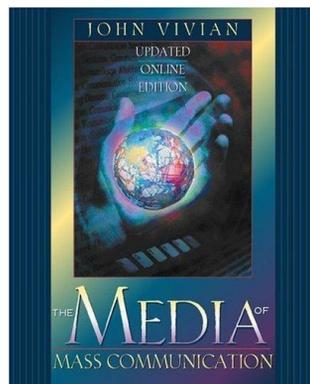- MySpace/Instant Messenger
- Pixar
- Videogame Violence

How can I increase the number of applicants for our department honor's show (the *Visions* Forum) and the campus-wide *Leadership Conference*?

FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

- I knew I would teach this course again
- I began to develop a plan for making student papers more interesting, both for them to write and for me to read
- I believed in the power of student interest
- I sought a much more diverse set of articles for students to choose from to begin research and expand interests
- … to support this objective, I scanned library databases
- I hit my town library every month, often before a weekend
- I scanned colleague offices for books and articles of interest—looking for classic articles in relevant areas
- I paid close attention to current media events (e.g., the fall of newspapers, Don Imus, social networking)
- I looked for articles that would increase my knowledge in the field (e.g., articles by colleagues, articles in relevant areas, cultural, post-modern, semiotics, intertextuality)

SECOND EFFORT
ONLINE OFFERING IN FALL OF 2009

Less Systems—More Theory

Pick an Article

5
Interesting Points

Honor's Show?

Poster

Choose a Topic

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4

Week 5

Week 11

Week 11-15

Week 12-15

Week 12

Final Paper Due

Reference 4 other Articles

Feedback Edits/ Comment

Outline

1st Draft
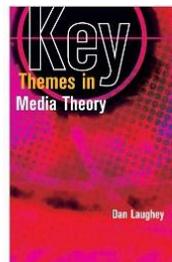
THEMES UNDER THE NEW PROCESS

- 9/11 Influenced Cinema
- Are Talk Shows Good or Bad?
- Citizen Kane's Influence on Filmmaking
- Dark Pasts of Film Comedians
- Essential Fundamentals of Marketing
- Facebook as a Social Networking Tool
- Female Sexuality and How the Media Portrays Women
- Gestalt in the Arts
- Ghostly Editors
- How Formula Influences the Horror Film Genre
- Media Bias Yesterday and Today
- Media Game Violence
- Medias Influence on Young Girls
- Publicity and Envy
- The Creative Process of Graphic Novelists
- The Impact of Pornography on Popular Culture
- Walt Disney and Anti-Semitism
- What Meant Most to Walt Disney?
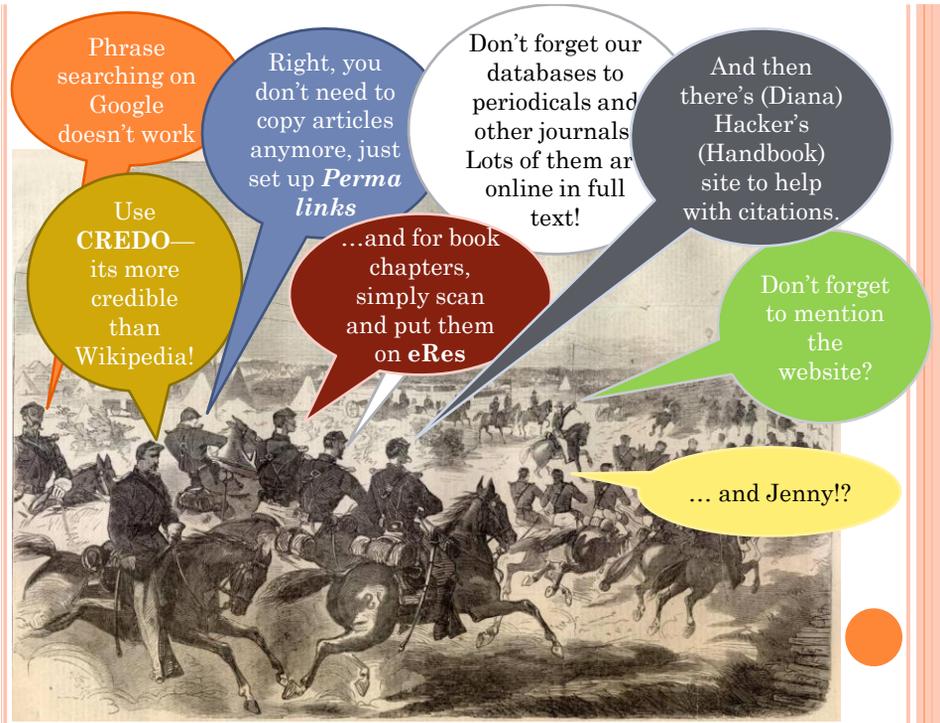
- **Often discounted by peers, the teaching of freshmen in what can be described as a general, introductory level course can be just as exciting as teaching an upper-level theory course, such as a topics course in an area of expertise.**

- **I believe that the library can be *the most* integral part of this course instruction in the future, especially in online or hybrid contexts.**

- **I am slightly concerned about students commitment to get the initial article on their own, as opposed to my handing it to them directly, as a tangible handout for them to read.**

IN SUMMARY

Thank you! Randy Howe, rhowe@fitchburgstate.edu

SCHOLARLY PAPER

Choose an article to read from the titles presented in class. Use this article *to develop a topic* for a 2,500-word (approximate size give or take a hundred words) scholarly paper (lines double-spaced in APA style). This paper will be written in steps with checkpoints as outlined below and in the syllabus. Final papers must reference the initial article and at least five other sources (e.g., relevant books, newspapers, journals, [reliable] web sites and other publications). Final papers should include a full analysis of your chosen topic, synthesizing source documents as a summary, possibly drawing conclusions.

For the record, the length of these instructions is 1,269 words, about half the length required for your final paper.

All students should initially achieve an understanding of the first article to the point where they can do additional research. Some of the articles, not all, are written for advanced students, academics and practitioners. Understanding the article and the sub-topics within is meant to be a challenge. Students should recognize that the more time spent with the subject matter, the greater the chance to write an informed paper.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE! If you are quoting someone, put it in quotes with a citation at the end of the quote, further citing the author at the end of the paper in a reference list. Final papers must use APA (American Psychological Association) style. This will be explained in the coming weeks.

Getting started. The course website will soon instruct you on how to access the article through library resources. Read it first. Take notes. Print it to highlight, write directly on it or whatever it takes to grasp what the author is saying. Make notes of what you've learned? Think about how this information relates to your knowledge of the subject? Did you rethink your point of view? What sub-topics are you now more curious about? <u>Remember that you are using this article to develop a topic for your paper</u>.

There are **seven checkpoints for this assignment**.

0. Pick an article to read. The "medium" or "high" rated articles are more challenging to grasp. Understanding articles such as these will bring you satisfaction. But you will not be graded on the level of article that you choose. It's up to you.
1. At checkpoint **one** you are required to present a list of five interesting points (one sentence each) that you have found in the article to the class via the *Discussion* area. The instructor will then provide you with additional information as a personalized handout to help you with checkpoint two.
2. At checkpoint **two** you are required to describe in the *Discussion* area the topic or angle that you have chosen for your paper with a short list of keywords to search for more information.
3. At checkpoint **three** you are required to show (or list in APA format for) four other related and reliable resources (e.g., articles, books; web sources) that will be used as references in your final paper in the *Discussion* area. At least one of these resources must come from a *print* resource (e.g., journal, book), perhaps from a library. Three more must come from searching online documents through the FSC library's online databases. Write a paragraph describing where you got these resources (e.g., "a search in ProjectMuse, in the journal *Leonardo*, which provided a full text pdf). You must cite *at a minimum* five reliable sources to include the initial article in your final paper. You may also use the textbook for this class as a resource.
4. At checkpoint **four** you are to submit an outline of the paper *or* a draft of your opening paragraph *or* both if you wish to show your premise.

5. At checkpoint **five** you are to submit a "completed" paper to the instructor. Don't forget to add a conclusion to show what you have learned. This is a *draft* that will be returned to you with the instructor's edits and comments.
6. At checkpoint **six**, you will have addressed or possibly incorporated the instructor's edits and comments, submitting the final paper. You will pick up the next assignment at this point (*Poster Presentation*).
7. At checkpoint **seven**, you will present a plan for the next assignment, the *Poster Presentation*. An option to you is to relate your paper to this assignment.
8. Not a checkpoint—a point of reflection. Consider this paper and poster again. Could you continue working on it for a future *Visions Forum* presentation (the annual honors show)? If so, make a point to see the instructor to discuss!

Suggestions
- ***Read and read again***. In the article if a paragraph or a sentence makes no sense to you at first, reread it and keep reading it until it does, checking additional sources perhaps to define unknown words, such as in a dictionary. Break it down. Take a sheet of paper and map the article out in outline form. Try to identify its structure in terms of themes and sub-themes. If it is still confusing, step away from it for a moment, take a break, then re-read it in a silent place or at a different time of day. This may help bring clarity to the article's message. Still having trouble? Make an appointment to see the instructor during advising hours.
- ***Start writing when you have something to say***. Don't start writing your paper until you have some notion of what your paper is about. Develop and use an outline to map *your* paper's structure.
- ***Keep a dictionary by your side***. And use it when necessary. Be aware that some of the terminology in your article may not be in the dictionary. Fields of study can invent vocabulary. When this happens, try to figure out what the word or phrase could mean possibly using the Internet (see next bullet).
- ***Tap into the World Wide Web***. When words or phrases make no sense to you try checking your textbook or doing a search on the Internet. If you are having difficulty grasping the meaning of a phrase (e.g., intertextuality, cognitive dissident, vertically integrated, somnambulance, cultural imperialism) simply go to a search site, TRY CREDO first, before Google, perhaps Google *Scholar*, type in to the search window the phrase in quotes (i.e., "cognitive dissident") and search to see how it is used. Another trick is to type in a phrase such as "cognitive dissident is." This may get you closer to a definition. Make sure the source is trustworthy, or read a few different sources to see if the usage is the same.
- ***Use your library***. Prepare a laundry list of items you do not understand or want to read more about and hit the library for books and periodicals that can help you. You might search for other publications written by the author, or authors found in the article's reference list. Remember that librarians are there to help you. Remember also that the library provides you remote access to online resources.
- ***Ask the instructor and your classmates***. There will be several in-class checkpoints leading up to the due date of this paper. Prepare questions beforehand and use this in-class time wisely to get the answers that you need.
- ***Use the writing center***. The college has resources available to you to help you to write your paper should you find it difficult. Check them out.
- ***Read the instructions again***. Did you do everything that was required of you? Consider re-reading these instructions.
- A few key components are:

  ❖ 2500 words   ❖ six references   ❖ APA style   ❖ double-spaced