

Overview

The goal:

Write a formal informative essay about an issue that is related to our connected society using credible sources in the field, sharing what they say about the issue. In the end, you are going to “*explain and show how their information is related to each other’s, how the information may connect and diverge*” ([Zhuravlova](#)) and what that information reveals about the topic—including ideas such as why this is important to think deeply about, what we should take into account and what we may need to know more about.

Leading up to this essay, we have read and watched a number of things related to our connected society. Those show you key aspects we’re focusing on for this essay, but you will choose which specific aspect and what path you’ll take in terms of what your essay is about. This essay is strictly informative synthesis.

In Chapter 5 of *A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing*, Svetlana Zhuravlova, the author of the section “[Informative vs. Argumentative Synthesis](#),” discusses this type of writing saying,

In informative writing, you are explaining the discussion points and topics to your readers without taking a position of one side or another, without showing your opinion. Even if the topic is debatable and highly controversial, instead of promoting your personal opinion, you have to *objectively introduce the ideas of others, explain and show how their information is related to each other’s, how the information may connect and diverge*. You are not showing your agreement with some authors and disagreement with the others. You should stay neutral both in your comments on the found information and in your conclusions reached at the end of the discussion.

Beginning Considerations

The following outlines some of the introductory ideas you should keep in mind.

- Style: A formal essay should be written in your voice and from your perspective but will use a higher level of diction and language. However, it should not be forced.
- With formal essays, avoid the *yous*.
 - Instead, you should use the specific noun or group you’re referring to.
 - I.e.: audiences, readers, advertisers, consumers, teens, adults, men, women, children, etc.
- Purpose: The purpose of this essay is to look carefully at a topic using sources, share that knowledge, and draw conclusions about the overall points of agreement, disagreement, conclusions other sources are making, as well as places we might not know a lot or that we need to investigate further.
- Do not try to convince or preach to your readers. Simply explain your information and *why or how it’s valuable, important, or helpful in understanding this topic*.

- Audience: The audience for this essay is a college-educated audience. They are familiar with general terms of most common fields, so you do not need to explain those general ideas. If you are looking at something very exclusive or esoteric, you may need to give some definitions or explanations. Ask your friends, teacher, and the writing center if they know what those things are or if they need a short explanation.
- You must use at least 4 sources. Two of them must be from our readings for this essay; the other two may be ones you find or ones linked to in any of our readings. (You can use more than 4, but due to the length of this essay, you should not go over 5.)
- We will do formal documentation for this essay. That means you need in-text citations where required and must have a works cited page.
 - For this essay, we will use MLA format. We will also look at sample essays in that format.

The Basic Structure of an Informative Essay

The essay has a general structure that you can use whether you're writing about a current issue, a literary work, or explaining and defending a point of view. The following outline illustrates that structure.

INTRODUCTION

- Provide an opening that gets readers into the topic. You might discuss the overall subject in general, provide some history or background, or use narrative to set the scene.
- Your thesis in an informative essay should sum up why understanding the aspects of the topic you're focused on are important.

BODY

Focus on the subtopics or reasons that are presented in your sources. For each of these you need a section that does the following. It may be a paragraph or a few paragraphs for each topic.

- Why is it helpful to understand or know more about this subtopic or idea? Answer that question with a full sentence and you have a great topic sentence for this section.
- Provide evidence (facts, quotes, statistics, etc.)
- Explain and interpret how the evidence fits into or illuminates what we know about this topic, what we need to know, or a basic premise to understand (see the questions for the conclusion below).

CONCLUSION

Draw a neutral conclusion on the topic pointing out the key finding or points made overall, where there may be disagreements, or what things we still don't know enough about

based on the sources you've used. It may also discuss importance, relevance, implications, etc.

This is a general outline, and much like a basic recipe, it is designed to be adapted. Writing, like cooking, uses a number of basic concepts, then allows the creator to play with and embellish on them to create something distinct and unique.

Final Essay

Begin work on putting this essay together by reviewing the grade sheet at the end of this handout. I grade looking for those things, so you need to make sure you keep those things in mind as you write. Once you've done that, look over your prewritings, and use those as a starting point to organize. Below are some important tips to remember. Since this is a formal paper, it should follow a fairly strict structure.

Remember, this is your goal:

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General Requirements

The essay should:

- Be correctly formatted: typed in a standard 12-point font, double spaced, correct heading and header in MLA format and citation style.
- Be at least 3 pages long, exclusive of your Works Cited page.
- You must use at least 4 sources. Two of them must be from our readings for this essay; the other two may be ones you find or ones linked to in any of our readings. (You can use more than 4, but due to the length of this essay, you should not go over 5.)

Turning Your Essay In

See your schedule for specific instructions.

Grading Criteria

Your essay will be evaluated based on the following standards. Please review them and take them into consideration when finalizing your essay.

Informative Synthesis Essay	
Format/Professionalism	
Was the document uploaded in the correct file type? (doc, docx, odt)	✓ X
Is the essay correctly formatted? (MLA)	✓ X
Does it meet length requirements? (3 pages, exclusive of the Works Cited page)	✓ X
Is it turned in on time?	✓ X
Is there a Work Cited page?	✓ X
Introduction	
Synthesis Essay: Introduction	
Does the introduction move the reader into the subject the essay and focus on the topic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing down the Basics, pp. 48-50 for discussion and examples. • Writing an Introduction: 3 Steps (Slideshow version) 	✓ X
Is the thesis a clear statement that sums up why understanding the aspects of the topic you're focused on are important? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come Up with a Strong Thesis 	✓ X
Content	
Does the essay use at least 4 college-level sources? While 1 may be uncredible or not college-level (meme, song, ad, etc.) as an example or primary source, the other 3 should be college-level sources. (No more than 5 sources) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing down the Basics, pp.62-65, Establishing Credibility. 	✓ X
Are sources smoothly integrated into sentences using signal phrases and transitions as needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writer's Reference, p. 727+ (pdf page number) Pay special attention to the section on Dropped Quotations and Signal Phrases, • Avoiding Dropped Quotations • Ashford University Writing Center: Integrating Research and their Video Tutorial • Signal Phrases and How to Use Them • A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success: Signal Phrases 	✓ X

<p>Is research cited with correct parenthetical citations as needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See pages 78-82 of <i>Writing down the Basics</i> • Citing Tables, Graphics, and Images in MLA • The Pearson Guide, pp 37-41--MLA in-text citations 	<p>✓ X</p>
<p>Development</p> <p>How to Write a Synthesis Essay</p>	
<p>Are paragraphs and topics introduced smoothly, integrating credibility, context, and/or situating the upcoming information in the topic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative vs. Argumentative Synthesis • How to Synthesize Written Information from Multiple Sources 	<p>✓ X</p>
<p>Does the writing explain how the evidence helps us understand an aspect or what it shows us about the issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Body Paragraphs • “Reading and Writing about Multi-modal Texts,” from A <i>Writer’s Reference</i>. Check out the pdf pages 156-163 • Literary Analysis of a Song • How to analyze an ad: New Mexico Media Literacy Project, especially “Deconstructing Media Messages” on pages 3-4 • 	<p>✓ X</p>
<p>If appropriate, does the writing bring up and address any opposing views?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concessions & Counterarguments 	<p>✓ X NA</p>
<p>Is the work organized to lead the reader through the thinking process that led to the writer’s outlook on the topic?</p>	<p>✓ X</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	
<p>Does the conclusion go beyond simply restating the thesis and content, and comment on the bigger picture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review this for specific ideas to discuss: How to Write a Synthesis Essay Conclusion 	<p>✓ X</p>
<p>Style</p>	
<p>Does the style—voice, tone, sentence style, and word choice—reflect the type of writing expected in this essay? (No I/me/my/you/your; formal tone and word choice.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to Avoid Using Personal Language 	<p>✓ X A few things to work on</p>
<p>Clarity</p>	
<p>Does the writing reflect grammatical and mechanical correctness expected at this level? See “Synthesis Essay Structure”</p>	<p>✓ X A few things to work on</p>
<p>Works Cited Page</p>	

Are all sources correctly cited on the Works Cited page?	✓ X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing down the Basics, pp 83-86 • Purdue OWL, MLA Section 	
Are all sources used listed used in the essay?	✓ X
Are all sources cited on the Works Cited page, used in the essay?	✓ X
TENTATIVE Grade (if you don't change anything for the final)	
-10 Missing Grammarly Report or ignored obvious advice from it	-
- Late points	-
+5 Writing Center	+
If you don't revise, this will be your final essay grade: Tentative Grade	
Grade for turning in this DRAFT	
	100
+5 Writing Center	+
-10 Missing Grammarly Report or ignored obvious advice from it	-
- Late points	-
Draft Grade:	
<p style="text-align: center;">↓ FINAL DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS ↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IMPORANT INSTRUCTIONS: READ SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY</p>	
<p>If you're happy with the grade listed as your TENATAIVE grade,</p> <p>✓ Don't do anything else. I will enter that grade in the Final.</p> <p>➤ If you turn in the same version, you turned in for the draft and make no changes, I will deduct 5 points for the time it takes me to compare both.</p>	
<p>If you want more points</p> <p>✓ Review my comments and suggestions here and in the video and the links in this grade sheet to help you improve your work.</p> <p>✓ Use Grammarly, go to the Writing Center, and then ask me any questions you still have. (Very short video on how to get your Grammarly report.)</p> <p>✓ Turn in your final version by the due date on your schedule.</p>	

Some Notes on Finding Sources and Developing Ideas

Your evidence and writing should be college-level. At this point you should realize that college-level does not mean big words or elevated language. It means clear, straightforward, and logical. It should come from sources that are reliable and credible. As the [Library website for the University of Georgia](#) points out, "A reliable source is one that provides a thorough, well-reasoned theory, argument, discussion, etc. based on strong evidence."

Notice the relationship between the definition of a reliable source and the type of argument we're working on? In both cases it's about thoughtfulness and logical reasoning.

Ask Yourself a Question and Search for Sources

Once you've chosen a topic, one of the best ways to start is by giving yourself a question to answer. If I'm interested how people not reading as much or not reading things that are as challenging as we used to because of smartphones and technology has an effect, I might do some research in the [library](#) and find out what topics are related to that which would lead me to an issue. And this is the key: your thesis needs to be an issue that is ultimately arguable. One that is not a fact, and that people can see differently. In this essay, we're not doing the argument part, but we have to do that in Essay 3, so make sure it's a debatable issue. So, the meme below that was posted to Instagram is saying something about what we read and what we pretend to, or think is worthy. That makes me think of how comic books are seen as silly. Here's my search and thoughts along the way to a thesis:



Citing AI in MLA Style

I found this on <https://cheezburger.com/25924613/a-shelf-full-of-book-memes-for-wholesome-bookworms-and-local-librarians>, but, there's a link under this image to an Instagram account, so I cite that:

@centrecountylibrary. Instagram, August 23, 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CwSboUVPsNw/>

How to cite Instagram: <https://style.mla.org/citing-instagram/>

How to cite a meme: <https://style.mla.org/how-do-i-cite-a-meme/>

Really great info on citing social media!

I searched for this on the [EPCC Library search page](#): comic books issues. I found this article "Why Comics Matter" The summary says this:

"The article highlights the challenges faced by comics and graphic novels, including book bans and challenges, while emphasizing their significance for neurodivergent readers, English Language Learners, and those developing reading skills. It underscores the importance of defending these mediums, as they have become best-selling book formats, with annual sales in the billions of dollars, and highlights the need to combat self-censorship among librarians."

This meme gives me a lot of ideas: comics as banned books, comics as helpful to different types of readers. I also notice this part: "It underscores the importance of defending these mediums, [. . .] and highlights the need to combat self-censorship among librarians." Which means that some of the pushbacks about whether or not comics are worthy reading even comes from librarians. (The source this is from *Booklist*, is a publication for librarians.)



That gives me a place to start. I will then read the article and see if it has stuff I can use and that helps me come up with a question. I make sure and get the PDF if it's available since it will make my citation easier.

Now I have two possible topics:

- I can talk about the issues in the original article and find other sources outside of *Booklist* to support it. (That's me making sure I have varied sources—not just info from one place)
- Or I might decide to focus on how comics and/or manga are helpful for struggling readers. (A question I can answer: How can comic books and/or manga [I'll have to decide which way I'm going] help struggling readers? Also, here's a possible answer: Helping readers can be tricky, but many experts point out that both comic books and manga stand out as something that can help many struggling readers.

I made sure to get the citation from the library search while I was there:

White, Adriana L. "Why Comics Matter." *Booklist*, June 2023, pp. 12–14. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=lfh&AN=164174435&site=eds-live.

(Of course, I'll have to see if other experts say this or not—don't discount the other side too! It's important.)

Here are some other ideas I might look at, but then again, I'm not done reading or thinking, so I might end up going in another direction.

~~~neurodivergent and second language readers, "good" books vs "bad" books, etc.—  
I'll see where the research goes.

Before I leave the library search for this article, I'll make sure to click on the "More Like This" link from the original library listing for this source to see if it gives me other sources I can use.

Once I have a couple of sources, I can begin thinking about what stands out for me. Reading though those, I will take notes on not only quotes, statistics, and facts that I want to share, but also what kinds of subtopics, groups of data, or aspects come up throughout the sources I'm using to develop a basic outline.

Sometimes when you write, you might find that as you work on parts of your outline, you just want to stop thinking about the outline and get to writing the essay. That's fine. Go ahead and do that. Don't stop the processes that help you get words on the page. Once you're done, go back through what you've written and paste it into the outline. If you're not able to fill in spots, then you know what you need to develop to fill out your argument.

If you've checked to see if you have all the parts and you do but your essay is still shorter than it should be, then develop another paragraph or two (or three or. . .) to fill it out. Of course, going to the writing center or reading this with a friend or classmate before doing this is also good since as readers, they can give you some advice on what will help them understand your argument even better.

Another note to self:  
New topic: All reading is valuable. ???  
Okay, so what do experts say about that?  
Find that and then maybe you can link these ideas.