

Research Paper Guide

The Research Paper is an opportunity for you to wade into the complexity of a contemporary or historical question or text that is of interest to you through broad research and reading. Since writing a research paper is a multifaceted process that is most successful when it unfolds over time, I ask you to begin thinking about it and working on it in different ways as soon as possible. My grading reflects the importance I give to the development of this paper over the course of stages.

I have prepared this Research Paper Guide to assist you throughout this process. Please refer to it over the rest of the semester as you develop your area of focus, do your research, and write your paper. Important requirements, useful resources, and helpful suggestions are included here. If you do not find your questions answered here, please let me know.

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Finding Your Focus and Goal

Broad Parameters

The paper (8-10 pages; 2400-3000 words) should aim to make an argument about a contemporary or historical question or text in part through engagement with the work of one (or possibly more) thinker(s) from our class. The paper should engage the ideas of the thinker in relation to new material that is not directly addressed by their writing. Please make sure to address in a substantive way the work of at least one thinker not addressed in your first paper. Below are a choice of three specific guiding frameworks. The research component of the paper is described in greater detail in a later section.

Guiding Frameworks

One of the most important steps in working on your research paper will be to select a question that is both exciting to you and feasible as a project. I encourage you to meet with me early in your process to talk about what topics interest you (you are required to meet with me at least once over the course of your project). Below are different frameworks that you may use to arrive at a problem for exploration.

A. Contemporary Issue –

Write a paper exploring a contemporary social or political issue, drawing on and engaging with the work of one or two thinkers from the class. Please see Appendix A, at the end of this document, with a list of suggested Contemporary Issue questions to help you brainstorm your own ideas.

B. Legacy of a Thinker –

What is the legacy of your chosen thinker in relation to a specific arena? How have their ideas been taken up by other intellectuals, activists, or social or cultural movements? In what ways do these individuals or movements build on or claim to be following in the footsteps of one of our thinkers? In what ways do they transform, update or challenge those ideas? Write a paper that explores whether, and to what degree, their work is in keeping with the specific ideas and broader “spirit” of the thinker’s work. Here are some examples:

- In what ways did South African anti-apartheid activist, Nelson Mandela, build on, transform and/or break away from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi? (Alternately, Martin Luther King Jr., or others)
- What is the relationship between the influential economic policies promoted by Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of economics and the work of Adam Smith? (you might begin by reading Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* and some critiques.)
- To what extent are Freud’s theories influential in psychoanalysis today?
- How have Marxist feminists taken up and/or challenged Marx’s rendition of class society?

- Please come speak with me, if you have an interest but do not know how to pursue it. There are many possibilities that we can brainstorm together.

C. Proposal to Add a Text to SFIII –

Write a proposal to the Social Foundations faculty for a text that you believe should be added to Social Foundations III. The text should be a work from the 18th century to the present day, that you argue has had significant lasting value and influence either regionally or globally, **and** brings a new voice and/or perspective that is not already included in Social Foundations III. Please use my syllabus as your reference point in your paper. Your paper should address:

- 1- Introduction – preview your proposal's argument and include a very brief (no more than two pages) overview of the author, the work, and the sections of the work that you would assign;
- 2- The significance of the text – What new perspective does this text bring to SFIII? How has this text been significant (in its own historical and/or more broadly)?
- 3- Teaching the text – How does the text relate thematically to other reading(s) in the course (provide a specific analysis that connects the text to at least one reading in the course)?
Optional: how does the text relate to a contemporary issue that could be addressed during class discussion?

I will be looking for substantive argumentation that draws from your reading of the text and of secondary source materials. Please address all the required points above, but avoid repetition between sections (if you already explicitly addressed a point in the last section, there is no need to repeat it later). Finally, you are welcome (but not required) to indicate where on the class schedule the text should be inserted, and whether it should replace an existing reading.

Defined Role, Goal, & Audience (optional)

As you develop your paper, I recommend elaborating for yourself a target audience and goal for your paper (much like was defined for you in your first paper). In other words, think of your paper as an effort to effectively communicate a message to a particular "real-world" audience. Position yourself as an **expert** who is speaking to an **intelligent and skeptical audience** who likely knows less about the topic than you do—in other words you need not write from your own perspective, but rather may adopt a specific voice or role in the paper. Here are some examples:

- a politician arguing for campaign finance reform through Rousseau's arguments about wealth and politics;
- a business leader arguing for other business leaders to adopt a minimum living wage, drawing from Adam Smith; or
- a feminist activist encouraging parents to join a campaign for making childhood as gender-neutral as possible, in part through de Beauvoir's writings.

If you define your paper in terms of a specific role and audience, you may either indicate them explicitly in the writing, or add an explanatory note to the beginning of the paper.

Identifying Sources & Doing Research

In the proposal stage you should frame your central focus in terms of a question or problem rather than a thesis. This is because your argument should emerge through the process of research, reflection, and writing. As such, one of your main tasks in writing the research paper is to read broadly and explore your central question from different perspectives.

To meet the minimum requirements of this paper you must draw on at least 5 outside sources (not including any works we have read in the class). Of these 5 sources, at least 3 must be scholarly sources, and 2 must be book sources (scholarly or not).

5+ outside sources total, including 3+ scholarly sources, 2+ book sources

However **more important than the number of sources will be your selection and engagement with these sources**. You should seek out the most reputable and scholarly sources available for the question you are exploring and you should include close readings and substantial engagement with the arguments in at least a few scholarly sources (simply including a quote from a source is not enough). Other sources may be drawn upon for different purposes (e.g., as a brief counter-point, to give some historical background, to provide a relevant example to discuss, or to provide evidence through pertinent research study).

Your research will include multiple elements:

- A. Researching **how scholars have interpreted the work of your thinker and the specific texts of interest**. This research should be drawn primarily from scholarly sources (explained below).
- B. Researching the **issue area** (if you are writing on a Contemporary Issue), or the **movement/individuals influenced** (if you are writing on the Legacy of the Thinker). This research could take different forms:
 - a. Scholarly sources
 - b. Reputable journalistic sources

Deciding whether a source is the best source available on a topic is a judgment call, but an important one. Always begin your research by exploring scholarly sources, but in some cases other kinds of sources may be appropriate or useful. The source you seek will depend on the purpose it serves. For example, it may be appropriate to draw on newspaper articles to describe current events of relevance, or to cite a policy report to describe a particular approach to an issue, or to draw on editorials to give a sense of the range of positions being taken on a topic. However, the bulk of your research should draw from books and articles that are scholarly in nature. Sources that are almost always inappropriate include Wikipedia, and blogs or websites authored by laypeople. See below for further guidance on selecting appropriate sources and please seek the assistance of a reference librarian or come meet with me for further help in identifying the best sources for your needs.

What is a scholarly source?

These are sources written by academics and experts in the field that are subject to a peer-review process by other experts in the field before being published. For an explanation on distinguishing between scholarly and non-scholarly sources, please see these sources:

- [A useful and succinct 2-minute video explanation.](#)
- [A more comprehensive explanation from a professor.](#)

How do I know if an article is scholarly?

As the above sources indicate, a scholarly article generally has certain features:

- It is published in an academic journal which subjects its articles to a “peer-review” process (google the journal title to find out more about it);
- It presents original research or analysis, rather than a commentary or a book review;
- It often includes an “Abstract” (this is not a requirement);
- It includes a list of references to other scholarly works.

In general if you have come across the article in a library database (JSTOR, Academic Search, etc.) **and** it has the above features, you can be fairly certain that it is a scholarly article. But even databases that have mostly scholarly articles, include articles that are not scholarly, such as book reviews or articles from popular magazines and newspapers. Look for an option to limit your results to peer-reviewed journals.

How do I know if a book is scholarly?

To check whether a book is scholarly, look up the publisher and see how they describe themselves (look for “academic,” “scholarly,” or “peer-reviewed”). Books published by university presses (e.g., Cambridge, NYU Press) are generally scholarly. In some cases well-researched books written for popular presses may be acceptable, but please check with me on that.

Are textbooks scholarly sources?

No. A textbook is a useful reference tool, but it does not count as a scholarly source and in general is not an appropriate source for a paper.

Should I use Google to find sources?

Even Google can be a useful resource for finding scholarly sources if used correctly, using **Google Scholar** and **Google Books** rather than the general search engine. [See “A Scholar’s Guide to Google” \(the tabs at the top of the page lead you to specific resources\).](#)

Format, Schedule & Grading

Paper Format (first & final drafts)

- No cover page
- 1 inch margins
- 12 pt. Times New Roman font or another similarly-sized font
- Double-spaced, no extra spacing between paragraphs
- Page numbers
- Attach a bibliography in a consistent format (preferably, MLA or Chicago). Please use either parenthetical citations (preferred) or footnotes, not both.

Schedule of Tasks

- A. **Variable – Meeting with me.** I require that you meet with me at least once over the course of the semester to discuss the research paper. When you would like to do so depends on when it would be most useful to you. Of course, you are welcome and encouraged to meet with me multiple times.
- B. **March 29** – At this point you should be narrowing down your topic. Although it is not required, you should feel free to email me 2 or 3 **paper topic ideas**. I will respond with a brief comment -- saying this seems feasible or not. Please meet with me for more thorough feedback on how to shape and specify your topic.
- C. **April 5 - Summaries of scholarly sources.** Separate instructions distributed.
- D. **April 19 – Paper proposal and annotated bibliography.** Separate instructions distributed. You are committing to the topic, but need not keep these sources; if you want to change the topic you will need to have a new proposal approved by me. Please note: I will not accept your final Research Paper on a topic that has not been approved via the paper proposal process.
- E. **Sun. April 29 by 11 pm– First complete draft** (for peer review) (7-10 pp.). *Cannot be accepted late.*
- F. **May 1 by 11 pm – Peer review** of two other students' papers. *Cannot be accepted more than 1 day late.*
- G. **May 1 and 3 – Student presentations**
- H. **May 3 – Final Paper** (8-10 pp.; 2400-3000 words); Please submit with a **cover letter** (~200 words) that explains how your paper developed and what choices you made in relation to the feedback you received via the peer review. Submit electronic version to NYU Classes. I may also ask you to bring a hard copy to class on Thursday Dec. 14.

Additional instructions will be distributed for most of the assignments. There will be deductions for tardiness. If you have a serious, unavoidable and documented reason for needing an **extension** on any assignment, please contact me at the earliest point possible.

Grading Criteria

Total: 35 points (please note that skipping any step will greatly affect your grade)

Meeting (1 point)

Scholarly Sources Summaries (2 points) – Close readings and summaries of two scholarly sources, one on your topic and one on your thinker.

Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (1 point)

First draft (3 points) – Full credit if on time, in the correct format, and 7-10 pages of original prose. *Cannot be accepted late.*

Peer Review (2 points) - Full credit if on time and answers all the required questions for both papers. *Cannot be accepted more than 1 day late.*

Presentation – (1 points)

Final draft and cover letter (25 points) *(if you choose Option C and have your paper topic/proposal approved by me, then these grading criteria will be adapted to fit the goals of your paper)*

- **Thesis or goal** – Has a clearly articulated argument or goal for the paper and explains why it should be of interest to the reader.
- **Examination of the central question** – Explores the central question to examine multiple perspectives and provide a compelling analysis that demonstrates breadth of knowledge and sophistication of thought.
- **Engagement with a thinker's work** – Critically examines and creatively extends the thinker's intellectual work in order to consider its relationship to the central question.
- **Sources and evidence** – Develops and substantiates arguments through engagement with appropriate sources, including at least five outside sources (including at least three scholarly sources and two books). Whenever possible, draws on scholarly sources. All sources are quoted, paraphrased and cited correctly.
- **Writing** - Writing is interesting, compelling, clear and well-organized; it is also free of grammatical, spelling and sentence-level errors. Paper is formatted correctly and includes a cover letter.
- **Deductions - Late submissions:** minus 1/2 point for each 24 hours late; not accepted after final exam. **Plagiarism** on any stage of this paper-writing process will lead, at minimum, to an F on the *entire final paper*.

Appendix A: Suggested Contemporary Issue Questions

The below suggestions are presented to help you brainstorm your own ideas. Please meet with me if you are having difficulty identifying a question of particular interest to you and we can brainstorm together. **If you do select a question from the list, do make sure to further specify the focus as you do your research and develop your argument.**

Questions	Applicable Thinker(s)
How do technological advances (e.g., internet, the self-driving car) affect inequality? Are smartphones refashioning human morality?	Rousseau, Gandhi, Marx, Smith
What is necessary to create a true democracy in (name a specific country or context)? What does the relationship between money and politics in today tell us about the relationship between capitalism and democracy?	Rousseau Smith
To what extent are capitalist market forces effective in meeting our essential human needs (specify, e.g., housing, healthcare)? How are communism and capitalism each implicated in the conditions of Chinese workers manufacturing U.S. products?	Marx, Smith Marx, Smith
What is the relationship between public education (specify, e.g., racial/economic segregation, standardized test) in the US today and liberty, equality or democracy? Is education alienated labor?	Mill, Fanon, Marx
What social purpose does religion serve today (specify – in relation to a particular religious tradition or religious community)?	Marx, Mill, Freud, Gandhi, Ahmad
What do guns mean to Americans?	Freud, Mill, Fanon
In revolutionary movements, when are non-violent approaches effective or not effective (specify a particular movement to analyze)?	Gandhi, Fanon
Are post-colonial societies (specify which ones) today liberated?	Gandhi, Fanon
What would Black Lives Matter learn from Gandhi or Fanon? What would Gandhi or Fanon learn from Black Lives Matter?	Fanon, Gandhi
Why are there different social expectations of men and women (specify, e.g., in different cultures, in the classroom, in appearance)?	de Beauvoir, Kauffman
Should men participate in feminist movements?	de Beauvoir, Kauffman
What are the politics of romance? (politics here refers to any power relations)	de Beauvoir, Hartman, Marx

Are microaggressions in daily life a serious element of racial or gender inequality?	Fanon, de Beauvoir
What are the implications of the increasing objectification of men in fashion?	Marx, De Beauvoir, Kauffman,
How do/should feminists in Muslim-majority societies (specify which one) advocate for women's greater control over their lives?	Ahmed, Amin, Fanon, de Beauvoir
How effective has cross-cultural feminist solidarity been? (specify the context and time period)	Ahmed, de Beauvoir, Fanon

These are simply suggestions, and all of these would require specification. The best paper ideas emerge from students' own interests. For example, students have recently written papers on: the economics of college sports; Nepali Sherpas and the economics of mountain-climbing; dance, pleasure and pain; food production, health, and sustainability; autonomous vehicles and individual liberty; beauty norms and individuality in South Korea; domestic workers in the post-colonial context; and gender in the culinary arts. You are welcome to stop by my office to brainstorm ideas or read some sample papers.

Appendix B: Working with Your Sources, and Other Writing Tips

Reading, Taking Notes, Reflecting - After you have examined a number of different sources and have gathered a smaller number of key sources, give yourself some time to work through each source, reading closely, taking notes, and critically reflecting on the source. Knowing your sources well—in terms of their broader goals and arguments, and the specific points that connect with your own arguments and goals— is essential to writing a strong research paper.

Using Sources When Writing - When developing your paper, use your written summaries and notes to guide you, referring to the text to check your page numbers and direct quotations. When writing, you will make use of sources in different ways, conveying their information or analysis through your own words, or direct quotations. Please write *in your own words* (with citations), using direct quotations only when a passage is written in a particularly compelling way that is important to your analysis.

In any case, it is important to maintain your authorial voice, even as you integrate direct quotations from outside sources. Each time you provide a direct quotation, you should *introduce* the passage (e.g., “Gandhi says...”) and then *comment upon* the passage (e.g., “This argument suggests...”). These techniques keep the writing in your voice, and ensure that you are explaining how a quoted passage connects to the points that you are making.

Citing Sources - Whenever you are using a source in your paper—whether summarizing it, paraphrasing a specific point, or quoting from it directly--*you must cite the source*. While a citation is not necessary when a piece of factual information (not an interpretation or analysis) is common knowledge, I would err on the side of providing more citations than necessary. Citations are essential for substantiating your arguments, as they tell the reader where the analysis comes from (i.e., you did not make it up, it is not simply your opinion), and allows the reader to check how reputable that source is. An absence of citation suggests that the ideas and words are entirely your own, which, if untrue, is a form of plagiarism. The consequences for plagiarism are grave, so always cite your sources! Please check with me if you have specific questions.

A few writing tips, based on common errors that I see:

1 - When using **parenthetical citations**, put the citation outside the quotation marks, but within the sentence, with punctuation after the citation. Example of parenthetical citation:

CORRECT: As Jane Smith says in her recent book, “blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah” (Smith 45).

NOT: As Jane Smith says in her recent book, “blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah” (Smith 45)."

NOT: As Jane Smith says in her recent book, “Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah” (Smith 45)

2 - All **quotations** that are **more than 4 lines long** must be set off from the main text as a block quote (a separate indented paragraph without quotation marks).

Example of block quote:

As Jane Smith says in her recent book,

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah. (Smith 45)

This argument implies that [your analysis]...

3 - When **integrating a quote** into a paper, your new sentences must be a complete and grammatical sentences. While it is fine to shorten a quoted passage, using ellipses (three dots) to indicate that words have been taken out, do not do so if the remaining sentence is ungrammatical (you may insert a new word in brackets to fix such a problem). Check for mistakes by reading your paragraph, including the quotation, out loud. If anything does not sound like a grammatical sentence, then you need to fix it.

4 – Learn these simple, but often **misspelled**, words:

- lose vs. loose
 - o Don't **lose** your keys.
 - o The shirt is **loose**.
- affect vs. effect
 - o The **effect** of the noise was to make the room feel smaller. [noun meaning **outcome**]
 - o The noise **effected** a change in the mood of the room. [verb meaning **caused or brought about**]
 - o The noise **affected** her mood. [verb meaning **had an effect on**]
 - o The woman's **affect** shifted after it became noisy. [noun meaning **emotions, feelings**]
- its vs. it's
 - o **It's** a beautiful day in the neighborhood. [it's = it is]
 - o Give the dog **its** bone. [its = possessive form of it]

Resources

Purdue OWL Guides on writing, researching and citation: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

- [MLA format](#)
- [In-text citations](#)