

Instructor Information

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Final Paper: Research, Argument, and Visual Literacy

Introduction/General Instructions:

Although it is clearly a comedic text, Stephen Colbert's satirical text, *America Again*, makes a variety of serious and often complicated arguments. For this assignment, you will analyze one of those arguments and conduct research to verify or refute its legitimacy. After you have conducted your research, you may find yourself in complete agreement with Colbert, but you might also find that, in light of the evidence you have gathered, you either disagree, or find the issues raised somewhat if not much more complicated than Colbert's text suggests.

In particular, we will be looking at Chapter Six, "Elections," pages 146-169, wherein Colbert deals with the issue of campaign finance. Consider what Colbert has to say about the idea of free speech, about big donors and small donors. What is his view of the Supreme Court? What does he have to say about Political Action Committees, and how they influence American politics, and presidential politics in particular? Your paper will make an argument asserting your own point of view, either confirming, refuting, or, ideally, complicating the argument as presented in *America Again*. In order to do this, you will have to discuss the merits and/or problems inherent in *not only the words, but the visual presentation of Colbert's text*. Remember, a great deal of Colbert's argument is made through *images*. Discuss those images, and the ways in which they *illustrate* his point; in what ways do they illuminate (or obscure) the nature of the issues discussed?

Given that Colbert's argument covers an awful lot of ground in a relatively short space, you will not be expected to address it in its entirety. You may, rather, choose one particular aspect of the issue. For example, on page 167, there is a picture of Robin Williams in costume as Mrs. Doubtfire, from his film *Mrs. Doubtfire*, next to picture of Robin Williams *out* of costume. This is presented a satirical evidence of voter fraud. Colbert seems to be suggesting that we should not take the issue of voter fraud very seriously. Why not? And what evidence can you find to support or refute this claim? This is just an example, of course. You will be expected to generate your own topics, questions, and ideas, and—after you've conducted your research—you'll be expected to generate a thesis statement, as well as the argument to support it.

It will be important to refrain from choosing a position or confining yourself to a specific thesis until you have already conducted at least some of your research. Remember: honest research begins with a question, not an opinion.

Learning Objectives

As your final paper, this is without a doubt the toughest assignment you will complete for this course, and will require you to demonstrate a command of all the skills you have developed over the course of both College Writing I and II. As such, all of the learning objectives on the syllabus are objectives here, as well. However, the particular learning objectives emphasized by this assignment center around critical reading (of both words and images), as well as—critically—successful research and argument.

In other words, this assignment requires that you build on and demonstrate the critical reading, writing, and thinking skills you have already developed (incorporating your reading of *images*, as well as words), with particular emphasis on rhetorical analysis. It will also naturally require you to demonstrate a command of the research and writing processes. These objectives are listed under the Learning Objectives heading on your syllabus as items 1 through 4, copied for your convenience in the space below:

1. Students will engage in the writing process, including drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading, considering clarity, purpose, audience, and style.
2. Students will explore the research process, including:
 - a. generating topics, ideas, questions, and problems
 - b. developing and supporting a thesis statement
 - c. finding, assessing, and analyzing primary and secondary sources of information
 - d. managing various research tools (the library, the Internet, databases)
 - e. proper documentation methods
 - f. academic honesty and avoiding plagiarism**
3. Students will continue to write texts that integrate their own thoughts with the words and ideas of others, practicing documentation skills and entering into the academic conversation.
4. Students will continue to sharpen their analytic skills by writing analyses.

Please take note of the bold typeface. It should go without saying at this point in the semester that if you plagiarize, you will receive an F.

Specific Requirements:

1. A strong thesis statement.
2. At least five sources (in **addition** to *America Again*).
3. Five pages.
4. Not four pages and a sentence or two on page five.
5. Five pages.
6. These pages should be covered with words.
7. The words should have meaning. Don't throw in a lot of fluff. Be concise.
8. That means your argument and your research have to be *substantial*.
9. To say that you couldn't think of anything else is to say after three pages without throwing in a lot of fluff is to say "gee, I'm sorry, professor, but I just really really really didn't want to do my homework."
10. *Thinking* constitutes a great deal of the work, after all.
11. In fact, writing *is* thinking.
12. This paper should be in MLA Format, with complete citations and a works cited page.
13. You know the drill.
14. Remember to fill out your rubrics.
15. Papers should be stapled.
16. Paper should be stapled.
17. Paper should be stapled.
18. For the love of God, a staple.

Details: Step by Step Instructions, Examples, and Due Dates

1. Begin with a question or a set of questions about the argument Colbert makes in Chapter Six. Remember to include images as well as words. For example, you might look at the panel of Supreme Court Justice portraits on page 157. Why does Colbert include the Exxon and Chevron logos? Consider this in the context of the sentence above, wherein he says you are free to disagree with their lifetime appointments. Obviously, Exxon is not on the Supreme Court, but how does big business, or even the oil business in particular, effect Supreme Court appointments and/or decisions? You can see how your question about Colbert's argument—and in particular, about his use of words and images—leads to a *research* question. In

the case of this particular issue, you might want to determine whether or not you think big business actually influences the Supreme Court as dramatically as Colbert suggests.

2. Come to class prepared to discuss your research questions in small groups on April 4. You'll discuss them in your groups, as well as with me.
3. Begin your research. Bring an annotated bibliography of your first three sources (at minimum) to class by April 11. Again, you will discuss them in your groups, as well as with me. The focus of the discussion should be on the intelligence and balance of your research thus far, as well as (and in particular) directions you might consider looking in for additional source material. What information do you have? What argument can you make based on the evidence you've gathered? And what kind of information are you missing? Is your research one-sided? Where might you find an alternate view? Are there claims made by any of the articles you've gathered that seem dubious? Can you verify those claims? And how? Where?
4. First Draft due for Peer Review April 16.
5. April 23, submit your Revision Plan to me.
6. April 25, Revision Plans returned.
7. April 30, Last Day of Class, Final Drafts Collected.

To Reiterate:

- April 4: Research Questions Due.
- April 11: Annotated Bibliography with Three Sources Due.
- April 16: First Draft Due.
- April 23: Revision Plan Due.
- April 30: Final Draft Due.

Grading:

See rubric, attached. You should fill out a copy of the worksheet and turn it in with your paper. Failure to do so will result in a zero. This is called "self-evaluation." It's good for you. Like carrots.

Percentage correlations are as follows:

A: 100-94; A-: 93-90; B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80; C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70; D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; F: 63-0

This particular paper counts for 25% of your total grade for the course.

Name: _____

Grade: _____

ESSAY GRADING SHEET

1 = Unsatisfactory 2 = Below Average 3 = Needs Improvement 4 = Satisfactory 5 = Excellent

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Appropriate grammar, punctuation, spelling used					
2. Follows correct MLA formatting like headings, line spacing, margins, parenthetical references, etc.					
3. Introduction identifies the subject in an interesting and thorough manner					
4. Thesis asserts a main idea that addresses the assignment, is clearly written, easily identifiable, and controls the essay					
5. Topic sentences clearly signal the main ideas of paragraphs in support of the thesis statement (Is not a question, quote, or fact)					
6. Body paragraphs contain strong assertions about the ideas and issues being addressed, supported by your own arguments and evidence that support the thesis					
7. Body paragraphs use well-chosen textual evidence (i.e. quotes), integrating them smoothly throughout					
8. Body paragraphs use sound reasoning and thorough explanations to explore the logic behind the assertions					
9. Works Cited page follows correct MLA formatting					
10. Fully addresses all aspects of writing assignment proficiently; stays on task throughout					
Totals					

USE THIS WORKSHEET TO EVALUATE YOUR PAPER BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN.

GIVE ME A COPY. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN A ZERO.