

PAPERS 2 AND 3: Introductory Overview to the Research Project

The Research Project Assignment:

For your major research project this semester, I will ask you to develop an argument about an object of study: a specific, profane utterance.

Steps in this Project:

To develop your research project, you will engage in two steps:

1. *STEP ONE: Write a Research Prospectus (Paper #2)*

A prospectus is a planning document that will help you structure your initial research on your project as you make decisions about a) which object of study you want to focus on, b) which scholarly tools you want to use to analyze that object of study, and c) which research questions you want ask about that object of study.

2. *STEP TWO: Write the Final Research Project (Paper #3):*

The final project is where you'll answer the research questions you've posed about your object of study, drawing on the scholarly sources you identified in the prospectus.

Project Vocabulary:

1. *Object of Study*

A paper *topic* is a broad and general issue that can be studied and analyzed. For instance, the general use of the term, “bitch,” by comedians is a *topic*. In contrast, an *object of study* is a single instance within that broader topic: it's a specific utterance, embedded in a particular context--such as a single usage of the word, “bitch.” For your final research project (and the Research Prospectus leading up to it), you might write about a politician's use of “fuck” at a specific fundraiser, about a specific performance where a comedian used a racial epithet, about an athlete's use of “faggot” toward a referee during a specific game. What all these instances have in common is that they are individual moments—a particular moment at a particular time and place where an individual speech act occurred.

Center your paper on an *object of study* that focuses on a specific, profane utterance. That utterance may be part of a public event that has been reported on in public forums (newspapers, magazines, blogs, news websites, etc.), or it may be something you said or experienced (i.e., personal experiences are allowed for this paper).

While your object of study will focus on a specific, profane utterance, that speech act may have provoked a response or several responses. For instance, when Dick Cheney uttered “fuck” on the Senate floor in 2004, there were a slew of responses. As the writer, you would choose the responses that seem most relevant to your project and include them in your object of study to research and analyze. In other words, your “object of study” will be a specific event which will probably include not only the profane utterance, but also the response(s) to that utterance.

Limits to selecting your object of study:

The goal of this paper is for you to contribute your voice as a scholar to conversations regarding your object of study. In order for you to do so, you must choose a moment when profanity was used *that has not been written about by other scholars*. If you choose a widely-publicized object of study that took place over 18 months ago--such as Dick Cheney's 2004 use of "fuck" on the Senate floor--there is a very good chance that some scholar somewhere has already written about that object of study. Your paper would then turn into a report on other scholars' analyses of the profane utterance. That's *not* the assignment.

To ensure that there is space for your voice in the scholarship on your object of study, you should do one of three things:

1. Write about a small, local instance where a profane utterance was reported on publicly (in local newspapers, a local blog, a local news source), but that remained a local news item, rather than a national or international item. For instance, when the (all black) Washington, DC Dunbar high school football team went to play a game against the (largely white) Maryland Fort Hill high school team and the "N-word" was allegedly used against the Dunbar team players, the local DC press picked up the story--but it remained a local news item, unreported on a national scale. If you go with this option, you may pick any instance, whether contemporary or historical, to work with. To find this type of object of study, you may want to focus on local or historic newspapers.
2. Write about an instance where a profane utterance was reported on publicly in the national and/or international press, but restrict yourself to utterances that took place in the *past 18 months* (i.e., since April 20XX). Given the publishing timeline of most scholarly publications, it usually takes 18-24 months before scholars respond to and analyze such public incidents in their articles and/or books. Thus, if you restrict yourself to utterances that have taken place since April 20XX, you'll be inserting your voice into the conversation before that conversation gets fully started (so there will be intellectual space for you to develop your own line of analysis and argument).
3. Write about a personal experience that involved yourself or a close friend/family member. Because you'll be writing about a personal experience, you'll obviously have a clear field for writing: no published scholars will have written about this object of study, so you'll be the one doing the intellectual work of contextualizing it, analyzing it, and developing your own line of argument.

Broadening your understanding of "object of study":

For the purposes of this class, your object of study must be an instance of profanity. The term "object of study," however, can be used in other contexts, for other assignments. It usually refers to a specific person (i.e., a specific political figure, athlete, or musician), group (i.e., the hacker group, "Anonymous"), event (i.e., a political assassination, a specific market crash, a specific experiment or case study), object (i.e., a specific novel or film), or place (i.e., Times Square). You may find it useful to think about this definition more broadly, so that you can start looking for "objects of study" in the scholarly articles you read, as well as the future papers that are assigned to you during your time at GW.

2. “Theory” Sources and “Theoretical Frameworks”:

“Theory” Sources:

“Theory” sources are scholarly texts that provide writers with the intellectual tools needed to *analyze, interpret, or evaluate* events, places, objects, phenomena, groups, or people (i.e., to help writers discuss their objects of study).

Disciplinary examples of how “theory” sources work:

- In the sciences, a “theory” source might be an article in *Science* that explains how to conduct an experiment in microfluidics—an experimental method which you might then borrow to conduct your own experiment.
- In the social sciences, a “theory” source might be an article explaining how a certain study was conducted (i.e., how to establish intercoder reliability)—an experimental method you could borrow to conduct your own study.
- In business, a “theory” source might be Adam Smith’s theory of economics--and you might draw on his theory to help you analyze your object of study (such as a recent federal decision about regulating banking practices). In other words, your “theory” of analysis is to apply Smith’s economic theory to your object of study.
- In the humanities, a “theory” source might be a feminist scholar whose work will help you analyze anything from a recent film to a Shakespearean play. In other words, the “theory” of analysis that this source enables is the application of that specific feminist theory to, say, *Hamlet*.

“Theoretical Frameworks”

Scholars—the people who produce “theory” sources—write to other scholars in their field: they read and cite each other to make visible their conversations. In disciplines within the humanities, those conversational networks are often referred to as “theoretical frameworks,” “intellectual frameworks,” or “scholarly lenses.”

To find a useful “theory” source, you have to identify the scholarly conversation taking place--the “theoretical framework” that houses that conversation. Such conversations sometimes cluster around a specific theory. Think of Adam Smith’s theory of economics, which has generated and shaped a number of scholarly conversations, or think of feminism or Marxism. These are theories that have engaged a number of scholars. In selecting such a theory, your task would be to familiarize yourself with several of the main voices within a particular theory and to decide which of those sources to adopt as the “theory” sources that would best help you analyze your object of study.

Or, you may choose to take a more disciplinary approach. Scholarly conversations are often clustered within disciplines and sub-disciplines, such as linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, literature, history, economics, biology, architecture, etc. Again, these are disciplines that have engaged a number of scholars. In selecting such a discipline, your task would be to familiarize yourself with several of the main voices within a particular discipline (or, more probably, a particular sub-discipline, such as the study of Hip Hop within African American Studies; or child development within

psychology) and then select from among those scholars the specific “theory” sources that will best help you analyze your object of study.

Profanity as a (mostly minor) framework for your project:

In addition to finding a framework (scholarly conversation) to engage with for your object of study, our course readings will provide you with a second possible framework: profanity. In our class, we’ve read scholars who are engaged in conversations with each other (witness how Stephens cites Pinker; how Seizer cites Douglas). Given that your objects of study must focus on an instance of profanity, almost all of you will draw on one or two course readings as “theory” sources contributing to those “framework” conversations on profanity.

The theory sources that you select are what will guide your approach to your object of study and determine the kinds of research questions you’ll ask. These theory sources will provide you with the tools to develop your own voice, your own analysis, your own critical inquiry into and interpretation of your object of study. Your use of these theory sources will push you beyond simply repeating what others have said about your object of study (writing a “report” on it), to *adding* to that conversation.

Paper #2: Research Paper Prospectus

Percentage of Final Grade: 25% of your final grade

Technical Details:

- A 1500-1750 word prospectus, formatted in MLA style, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman or Arial. *Please include your final word count (not including the Works Cited page) in parentheses after the final paragraph of the paper.*
- Works Cited page: This page should include at least **two scholarly sources** found through the library’s electronic subscription services and the book catalog. **At least one of these sources must be a book.** The Works Cited page should also include several object of study sources (which may be newspaper articles, websites, blogs, etc).

Due Dates:

Finalize object of study and explore possible frameworks...Wednesday, [DATE]

Workshop drafts are due at your individual conferences with me:

Individual Conferences.....Monday, [DATE]

Individual Conferences.....Wednesday, [DATE]

Individual Conferences.....Friday, [DATE]

Final drafts due on Monday, [DATE], in class.

Definitions, Goals, Tips:

A “prospectus” is a genre commonly used to establish the intellectual parameters of major projects, such as honors theses or capstone writing projects. A prospectus is also useful, however, for long research papers, as it will help you delineate the major aspects of your project *before you sit down to write the paper*. It’s a trouble-shooting tool that allows you to test out the different parts of your project at an early stage—before you’ve committed a massive amount of time to researching and writing—to see whether you’re likely to hit a dead end, and whether the lines of research you’re following are leading to the kinds of research questions you’re actually interested in exploring.

College writing asks you to *add your own voice* to scholarly conversations. To do so with credibility and authority, you need to give yourself analytical tools. “theory” sources will provide you with the criteria/tools/lenses to develop your *own* analysis about your object of study. Your research on your object of study and “theory” sources must be completely separate: you may *not* draw on the same sources for these different parts of your research. Because your theory sources will be completely different from your sources for your object of study, *you* will have to do the intellectual work of applying the theory sources (your analytical tools) to the information and narratives that you’ve gathered about your object of study. In doing so, you will develop your own analysis/interpretation/ evaluation of the object of study.

Finally, the prospectus helps prepare you for the moment when you develop the “research questions” that will structure and guide your final paper. The task of the final research paper will be to answer these questions. “Research questions,” as defined by this prospectus, are open-ended. That is, they are interpretive, evaluative, analytical, or argumentative questions (i.e., questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no,” and that cannot be answered just by looking up factual information). These questions should arise from your theory sources but should be articulated in terms of your object of

study (i.e., *the questions should be about your object of study*).

Formatting this Assignment:

This prospectus will be formatted in a series of individual sections that will be set apart from one another by subheadings. The subheadings that you'll use are given in the chart below. After each subheading, you'll write one or more paragraphs, giving however much information is needed to respond to that prompt (without, of course, exceeding the set page limit for the assignment). You may decide to combine several of the subheadings or change the order of the entries. For instance, some of you may prefer to begin by describing the background context for your object of study, before introducing the object of study itself. Others will choose to merge the “keyword” section into the “theory sources” section. That’s fine, but please do include all the relevant subheadings for any given section.

Below is not only the prompt to which you’ll be responding for this analytical portion of the assignment, but also the rubric that I’ll be using to grade the paper.

Assignment:

<p><u>1. Object of Study and its Rhetorical Situation:</u> The object of study identifies a specific, profane utterance, along with any relevant responses. In this section of the prospectus, you’ve brought in enough information to introduce your object of study to readers unfamiliar with it.</p>	18 pts
<p><u>2. Theory Sources and their Corresponding Theoretical Frameworks</u> Begin by naming the framework (scholarly conversation) within which your “theory” sources are situated. Then introduce two or three “theory” sources within that framework (most students devote a separate paragraph to each theory source). Where appropriate, research debates within the framework and select theory sources that represent alternative/oppositional perspectives. Your description of each theory source should address readers unfamiliar with it and follow the “SCaD” process, where you include a <u>S</u>ummary of the source, <u>C</u>ontextualize a quotation from the source so that readers can understand the quotation as we’re reading it, <u>a</u>nd <u>D</u>iscuss the quotation (showing your readers what you want us to see in the quotation). Your handling of the “theory” source should be detailed enough that by the time I finish reading about each theory source, I should be able to see how it will help you develop your analysis of your object of study.</p> <p>REQUIREMENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your “theory” sources for this section should have been found through the library’s services and MUST be one of the following types of sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ scholarly journal article ○ book ○ legal case • Your “theory” sources must explore different information/ideas (i.e., two “theory” sources explaining that trash talk is beneficial in the heat of a game would be redundant) 	42 pts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include <i>one or two italicized sentences (but not more)</i> at the end of each SCaD paragraph that briefly <i>applies</i> that theory source to a specific aspect of your object of study, to show the line of analysis you plan to use the theory source to develop in the final paper. <p>Target length = Approximately 2 pages</p>	
<p><u>3. “Research” Questions:</u></p> <p>REQUIREMENTS:</p> <p>At the beginning of this section (which can be a bullet-pointed list of questions), re-name the scholarly framework from which the questions will arise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at least <i>three questions</i>—more, if possible—from the named framework • Name (in parentheses next to each question) the theory source(s) that will help you answer that particular question. • The questions <i>MUST be articulated in terms of your object of study</i> because your paper is about the object of study, <i>not</i> your theory sources. • At least one major set of debates should be visible in your questions. <p>NOTE: “Research” questions are open-ended questions that invite analysis, interpretation, or argument <i>about your object of study</i>. The work of your final paper will be to answer those questions.</p>	15 pts
<p><u>4. Keywords:</u></p> <p><i>Definition:</i> Keywords are words that you, as the researcher and writer, plan to explicitly define in your final paper in order to shape how your readers think about those terms.</p> <p>REQUIREMENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devote one full paragraph to defining a keyword • <i>Cite at least one scholar (and possibly more)</i> to help you establish your definition (“scholar” means you need to draw on scholarly journal articles, books, or legal cases). Introduce your source, draw upon a quotation to help you define the keyword, and explicate the quotation. • Make visible to the reader (explicitly or implicitly) why you picked this keyword (i.e., why giving it a precise definition matters to your project) <p>TIP: Do <i>not</i> cite a dictionary definition or encyclopedia (including Wikipedia). Doing so would signal to your reader that you’re not an expert on this topic--and that’s a problem in a research paper. Instead, cite the scholars you’ve been reading: use these definitions to make visible the range and depth of your research to your readers. A potential exception to this rule is profane words. For instance, while a number of scholars have provided definitions of the “n-word” and “bitch,” it’s very difficult to find scholars who provide definitions of “faggot” or “gay.” If you are struggling to find a scholarly definition for one of your keywords, talk to Prof. Hayes about it.</p>	10 pts

<u>5. Correct grammar/Clear of typos:</u> <i>NOTE: Not a subheading – this is a grading criteria</i>	5 pts
<u>6. Correct formatting of the Works Cited page</u> <i>NOTE: Not a subheading – this is a grading criteria</i>	10 pts

Professor Hayes
[FYW COURSE]

Final Research Project

PERCENTAGE OF FINAL GRADE: 35%

ASSIGNMENT:

This paper will bring together all of the work you have done this semester. It should present, in beautifully worded prose, a provocative, complex, and persuasive argument about an object of study that focuses on a specific, profane utterance. Contextualize that utterance in order to make visible the impact of the rhetorical situation on the word/phrase as it was used in that particular time and place.

Your argument about this object of study should...

- Be grounded in the research you have done on your object of study;
- Include whatever background context your readers will need to understand your argument fully;
- Be shaped by your exploration of theory sources drawn from at least one framework;
- Make visible the exigency for writing this paper (the immediate, pressing need for the intervention you are making in the conversation surrounding your object of study).

NOTE: This essay is not an extended summary of (or report on) your various sources. Instead, it is your opportunity to make an original contribution to the conversation surrounding the object of study that you are examining.

TECHNICAL DETAILS:

- **2500-3000 words**, double-spaced lines, one-inch margins, 12 point font, Times New Roman or Arial. Number the pages. *Please include your final word count (not including the References page, DO include the title page and abstract in the word count) in parentheses after the final paragraph of the paper.*
- **References (APA format)** with a **minimum of 8 sources**, including at least three scholarly sources. At least one of the three scholarly sources must be a book; at least one must be a scholarly journal article.