

PHI 335: Philosophy and Democracy

Fall 2004

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Research Paper Assignment

The research paper project is your opportunity to pursue a subject relating to Philosophy and Democracy in some depth. The readings so far have provided numerous concepts, problems, theories, and individual thinkers that are worth deeper investigation. See the *MLA Handbook* for worthwhile advice about how to develop a topic and organize your overall research project.

The research paper assignment consists of two main parts:

I. Research Proposal and Bibliography (10% of semester grade) Due Nov. 4

A. Prepare a **one-page proposal** for your research project. The proposal should do the following:

- Identify the *topic* you plan to write about.
- Explain a bit of the *background and context* that makes the topic important and interesting in your view. That is, you should explain the problem or problems this topic introduces, which warrants further research.
- State a *preliminary thesis* or hypothesis concerning the question you expect to address.
- Sketch a *proposed outline* for the paper.

We all understand that the research process itself will most likely lead you to alter or even abandon your original proposal. You therefore need to work up a proposal, so there's something worth altering or abandoning. :)

B. Append a 12-15 item bibliography to your proposal, formatted according to guidelines in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, sixth edition. This bibliography should include a variety of kinds of sources relevant to your topic. Primary and secondary materials, books, print articles from professional journals and popular periodicals, online sources and other materials may all be relevant for your particular project. The bibliography ensures that you have an overview of what is available, and have identified a few promising starting points that will form the core of your research for the paper.

Note that we will meet in a Library classroom on October 28 to work on the bibliography. Consider submitting your topic to me by email by October 26 so I can forward it to the librarian who will be conducting the class on the 28th.

II. Research paper (25% of semester grade)

Due Nov. 30

A **3000-3500 word paper** (12-15 double-spaced pages) on your chosen topic. Fully documented and polished exploration of the issue, leading to and supporting a definite thesis concerning the issues you raise. Note that this is a philosophy paper, which is somewhat different from a history paper or other kinds of "objective" reports. The assignment asks you to take a position on a significant issue. The purpose of the research is to identify, explain and clarify the problem at hand as well as possible, and to help you develop arguments that support your conclusions.