

Term Papers
LART602
Winthrop University
Prof. Oakes

From the syllabus:

Presentations: Each student will present to the class a summary of his/her research project. The intent, here, is to help the student to define clearly his/her project and to receive useful feedback on the project from the rest of the class. Presentations will be scheduled in consultation with the student.

Term Paper: The student will prepare a substantial essay on the topic of reason and the rational order. This is the primary productive task of the course.

Write a substantial essay on the role of reason in (our understanding of) world order.

You have a good deal of latitude in defining the particular focus of your essay. The primary requirement is simply that it address the (or some) relationship between reason and order. A second requirement is that your essay make some significant use of or reference to some of the materials of our course. (You have a fair amount of latitude, here, as well; you may think of our readings and discussions as a starting point.) Otherwise, I leave it to you to decide where your particular interests lie – in consultation with me. (Consultation with me is intended to ensure that your essay is a manageable project and meets the general requirements of the course. I encourage discussion with me prior to submitting your essay proposal.)

Proposal Due: Tuesday, Oct. 8 (in class)

Presentation Due: by arrangement with instructor (please don't wait until the last minute)

Paper Due: Monday, December 2 (the last day of classes)

Proposal: Submit a written proposal for your term paper, to include:

1. A statement of the topic or issue that your essay is intended to address. This may take the form of a question (but needn't). Aim for a single-sentence statement of the issue, supplemented, as needed, by further explanation.
2. A working thesis (if you have one). I.e., if you have already in mind a claim or position that you wish to defend or demonstrate, then state it. Again, aim for a single-sentence statement, further elaborated as needed.
3. An annotated bibliography of materials identified to date as potentially useful in your project. Bibliographical information should be as complete. Annotation should include a brief summary of the text (or portion thereof) and should indicate the use you may make of it.

Research

- The extent to which your essay draws on resources beyond those in our syllabus will of course vary. I would expect to see perhaps half a dozen significant resources or more. More to the point: as a research essay, part of your task is to consider what others have said that may be of use to your project.
- More on research methods to come.

Format:

- On the order of 20 pages, or more, double-spaced, typed.

- Include page numbers, please.
- Formal bibliography of works cited.
- See my style sheet (on my web-page) for further preferences.
- You may submit your essay in electronic form if you wish to receive comments in electronic form. You may also submit your essay on paper, in which case I'll need an address for return by mail. Either is fine with me.

Presentations:

- Your presentation may occur at any time during your work on your project. There is value in reporting early as well as later in the process. Please let me know when you would like to present.
- Presentations should include the following:
 1. A statement and explanation of your topic/issue;
 2. A statement and explanation of your thesis (position), if you have or seek one;
 3. Description of materials and resources that you've identified to date, and their role in your overall project;
 4. Description of any further materials/resources that you intend investigating or using;
 5. Statement and explanation of any issues or challenges or concerns that you face, at present, in your efforts. (Requests for help.)
- Try to keep your presentation time to 10 minutes or so.
- Feel free to use presentation tools as desired (powerpoint, etc.); none is required.
- Focus on clarity of presentation, clarity in defining for the class what you are working on. Your goals are (a) your own understanding of the project and (b) suggestions/feedback from others.
- We'll take some time for discussion, following your presentation.

Some Topic Suggestions – any of these can be modified, limited, or expanded; the list is not intended to be exhaustive:

- A general assessment of the extent of rational order in our universe;
- A general assessment of our ability to know the (extent of) rational order in the universe;
- A characterization of the (or a) relationship between order and chaos;
- Focus on a specific issue concerning the non/existence of order (e.g., the problem of evil, the possibility of free will, fate, etc.);
- Focus on a specific figure concerning the non/existence of order (e.g., Plato, Sophocles, Leibniz, etc.);
- Focus on a specific aspect of the world, our experience, etc. *vis a vis* the non/existence of order (e.g., the physical world, the moral, the role of divinity, etc.);
- Comparison of figures concerning the understanding of chaos/cosmos;
- Comparison of eras concerning the understanding of chaos/cosmos;
- Develop a connection between our materials and your other research or learning efforts.

Advice:

- If this is your first substantial research essay effort, don't be intimidated. Writing longer essays is not much different from writing shorter ones. It still boils down to a single thesis elaborated over the course of the essay. The main difference is that the longer essay has more parts (or parts with more parts). The key to success is organization, in your own mind, of what you are doing.
- Get started early. The semester has a way of getting short sooner than we expect.

- Work steadily and regularly. Substantial writing projects take time to mature, and will mature well if their development is relatively continuous, rather than episodic.
- Work incrementally. Work on one or two things at a time. Avoid checking out a pile of books or articles to be read “later” as rarely happens. Rather, follow one or several ideas at a time, locating and digesting new sources as needed. (Dacus Library is open 24-hours/day, M-R, beginning Sept. 2.)
- Keep good records. (i) Bibliographical: there’s nothing worse than trying to find a passage once its exact location is lost. Be in the practice of recording bibliographical information as soon as you start to work with a source. You can always delete it. (ii) Take notes on everything that you read. Worse than losing that passage is forgetting who wrote it in the first place. Write short summaries of readings, once completed – even if it’s just something you skimmed, strike while the iron’s hot. You won’t want to take the time, later, to re-read. (Be sure to write a complete enough note that you can later understand it; use complete sentences.)
- Keep track of your overall goal. Begin each study session by returning to your primary issue or thesis. I write mine down, again, each time I begin work – this helps to keep headed in the same one direction, and also helps to keep track of subtle shifts in thinking.
- Be willing to change. As your project develops, it may take you in unexpected directions. Don’t resist change simply because it’s change. But do keep an eye on the overall integrity of your project, as above; it must have a clear, central logic.
- Talk. Talk about your project. Talk with everyone. The more you talk about it, the better you’ll understand it and the better you’ll be able to explain it. We often gain insights from unexpected quarters.
- Use your instructor. My goal is your rewarding learning experience. Let me know how I can help, both with content and with method. I am happy to read anything that you draft and will brainstorm with you at any time.
- More advice and writing instruction to come.