

Spinning Science: The Use of Science and Scientists in Public Debate

Two: What's the Real Story? Investigating and Analyzing Scientific Discourse

Due Dates:

- See p.2 for due dates on pre-essay proposals.
- First Version: Fri. 10/29
- Workshop: Wed. 11/3
- Revision: Fri. 11/12

Suggested length: 10 pg., typed, double-spaced (not including figures), with bibliography and cover letter. Please attach to revision the marked-up first version with my comments.

Essay Assignment:

This essay is an investigative piece, which asks you to compare different perspectives on a contemporary scientific issue. This assignment challenges you as a writer to work with and compare various perspectives and sources while discovering or maintaining your own views. We might think of “different perspectives” as different lenses through which to view a scientific question or issue. These lenses might be political (e.g., comparing different stances on alternate fuels or allowable levels of lead in drinking water), sociological (e.g., comparing different causal explanations for the rise of asthma in the U.S. or another country), historical/cross-cultural (e.g., examining the links between media and violent behavior in children in two different countries or historical eras) or cultural (e.g., analyzing different images of and perceptions of GMO crops in the U.S.—or another country—in the popular press or film and academic literature).

In your research for this essay, you should draw upon secondary sources such as books and journal articles. You also have the option of drawing upon your own (and others’) life experiences, as well as journalistic and other popular media sources (newspapers, magazines, television shows, films). For this assignment, you are asked to do a small “community research project”: visit at least one organization (e.g., lab or scientific organization) that addresses this particular topic, collect relevant pamphlets or literature and interview a staff member about the organization’s philosophy and approach to this issue. (Web research is an excellent way to begin your community research and, potentially, to find some relevant documents. However, you need to set up an interview as well. Guidelines to successful interviewing will be discussed in class.)

Writing Challenges for Two:

- In Pre-writing: “mapping” your topic; figuring out various angles on the issue
- Drafting/revising: clearly and comparatively presenting different points of view, drawing upon secondary sources;
- Drafting/revising: fairly presenting opinions differing from your own
- Drafting/revising: establishing an engaging style, maintaining your own voice

While crafting this essay, remember that your options as a writer include: siding with one

perspective (while recognizing the power of another); adopting a stance that combines aspects of different perspectives or simply recognizing the value of the multiple viewpoints (or a debate) in deepening your readers' understanding of the issue.

Pre-Essay Exercises

Wed.10/13: Topic Ideas (a paragraph or two). If you are considering a few different ideas, include them all! Bring THREE copies.

Mon. 10/18: Topic Proposal, First Version: Write a 2-3 paragraph proposal with a working bibliography of at least FIVE secondary sources. In the proposal, tell the reader (a) why you've chosen the topic and how you identify the different perspectives (b) why you feel the topic would be interesting for a wider audience and (c) some ideas for community research. Bring THREE copies of the proposal.

Wed. 10/20: Revised proposal: should incorporate (a) and (b) above with (c) specific plans for community research- who will you interview and when? (What kinds of questions will you ask?) Revised bibliography (on separate page) should use full citations (2-3 pg., typed, double-spaced). Consult the Mayfield handbook for correct formats.