

Guidelines for Major Writing Assignments

Your assignment is to write a paper on a book. You may select your book from one of the following four.

Ronson, J. (2011). *The psychopath test: A journey through the madness industry*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Dombek, K. (2016). *The selfishness of others: An essay on the fear of narcissism*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Haidt, J. (2013). *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Vintage Books.

Altemeyer, B. (2006). *The authoritarians*. Self-published and online at: <https://theauthoritarians.org/options-for-getting-the-book/>

Minimum number of words required. Your paper should be at least 1500 words (use the “word count” function in your word processing program to count the words). 1500 words is approximately five and a half pages double spaced, assuming 12 point Times New Roman font and margins of 1 inch above and below and 1.25 inches on each side.

If there are more than three lines of quotation on any page, I will deduct the words of those lines from your word count for grading purposes. Nevertheless, properly APA-style quotations (with corresponding APA-style references at the end) are encouraged. You are welcome to fill your papers out with relevant quotations, but you will still be required to write at least 1500 of your own words for each paper. Beware: do not try to plagiarize (i.e. not attribute a quote to its author) in order to avoid thinking of things to say in your own words. If my plagiarism-searching analysis of your paper finds even one plagiarized quote, you will receive a zero, that includes if you are plagiarizing yourself from a paper you turned in for another class.

I do not count your cover page, references or abstract (if you have one—no abstract is required) in your word count—only the words of the main body of the paper that are not quotations from someone else.

Make a real effort to avoid grammatical, stylistic and spelling errors. I recommend reading your paper out loud to yourself, or, even better, another person, each time you revise it. If you use this method, you will be surprised how effective it is for ridding yourself of grammatical errors and bad style. Also, please use spelling and grammar check in your word processor, and do not be shy about seeking help from the writing center.

Try to have your paper make logical sense, and focus what you write on points that are relevant to what the paper is supposed to be about.

This is hard to do if you are used to the leaps of logic that people make in ordinary conversation. When you are writing, you need to attend in more detail to whether each sentence makes logical sense and follows appropriately from previous sentences. It is very important here to try to imagine things from the reader's perspective. What do you know that the reader does not? Assume that the reader is not me. Imagine someone else, a stranger, reading the paper. Would it make sense to a stranger?

Take time to organize your paper into a logically sensible structure. It may even help to do an outline of the paper and then try to follow that outline, though it is okay to revise the structure as you work, if it seems to make logical sense to do so.

When it is possible for you to do so, say something interesting, original, and challenging to common ways of thinking. You are not in college just to parrot the points that other people have already made, but to develop enough knowledge and wisdom to add something unique. However, be careful. Being original should not mean making confusing and bizarre leaps of logic.

TOPICS FOR THE PAPER

When writing your papers, please either address the topic suggested below or check your topic with me during office hours or after class:

Book: *The Psychopath Test*

Suggested topic: Referencing the evidence from the book, and drawing on other evidence from your own research, do you think that psychopathy is a personality trait that can be changed or do you think that psychopaths are pretty much stuck being the way they are? Do you think that certain cultural, political and economic arrangements empower psychopaths or encourage psychopathic behavior in otherwise genetically ordinary people? Regardless of how you answer these questions, propose a way of minimizing or optimally sublimating the influence of psychopathy in society, and explain the reasoning and evidence behind your proposal.

Book: *The Selfishness of Others*

Suggested topic: Referencing the arguments and sources in the book, as well as from your own research, do you think that psychologists should use the tools of psychological science to identify narcissists so the rest of us can stigmatized and ostracize them? Or do you think that the fear and hatred of narcissism itself reflects a kind of narcissism? What is the best use of the concept of narcissism, if it has any good use at all? Make reference to the Freudian origins of the stigmatization of narcissists, and how and why the author thinks that the prototypical example of narcissism has changed over time.

Book: *The Righteous Mind*

Suggested topic: Explain what Haidt's "Moral Foundations Theory" proposes about the range of human moral impulses. What are the moral foundations that Haidt identifies? How does he use the empirical evidence related to these foundations to explain the political conflict between those called "liberals" and those called "conservatives" in the United States? What is his recommendation for how to make this conflict "better"? What do you think of his explanation and recommendations? Why? Make appropriate reference to your own outside research as well.

Book: *The Authoritarians*

Suggested topic: What does the author, Bob Altemeyer, say that authoritarianism is about? What kinds of psychological inclinations are authoritarian inclinations? Does Altemeyer acknowledge a difference between authoritarianism and conservatism, or between authoritarianism and religious faith? What does Altemeyer see as being the danger of authoritarianism? What do you think is the best way of dealing with the fact that some people in a population are going to have authoritarian tendencies? Do you think that society can find a good use for the authoritarian personality, one that makes the most of its strengths but avoids its dangers? How would you propose doing that?

HOW I WILL GRADE THE PAPER

30% word count. This is not all or nothing. I will use "word count" to determine what percentage of the required 1500 self-written words you achieved. Remember that I will not count any long quotes towards your word count requirement, so if you use long quotes, be ready to write that many more of your own words to meet or exceed the requirement.

10% Having at least three references other than the book itself—and NO the textbook does not count, nor does Wikipedia or Facebook or Instagram any internet source that does not correspond to an actual book or journal or magazine or newspaper. You would do best to go to a library and use it.

30% general writing quality (heavily influenced by spelling and grammar, etc. but not limited to this). A well-written paper is a paper that I can read over smoothly without going "huh?" "what?" "augh!" constantly.

10% Logic, organization and accuracy. This is not unrelated to writing quality, but specifically refers to whether you have made the effort to try to be accurate in what you say and to have one sentence logically follow another as part of an overarching sense-making structure in the paper.

10% Using APA style in the composition of your paper (especially for citations and references).

5% interestingness, originality, challenging ideas: Too often students just write standard old stuff that at best demonstrates understanding, but offers nothing new,

original, complex or interesting to the analysis. If you can pull off some actual interestingness, you'll get high marks in this category.

5% Spelling, grammar, expository writing style, being typo free