ESSAY vs. RESEARCH PAPER

CSS 104 Handout #34

As you get closer to the time when your term project paper is due, it might be worthwhile to review the differences between an essay and a research paper.

What you have been writing all quarter in your weekly assignments have been "essays". According to the MLA web site, an essay is "five paragraphs or more in MLA format on a given subject, style, or topic". As you may remember from English classes, there are several TYPES of essays. Listed below are terms with which you may be familiar.

Cause/Effect	Descriptive
Compare/Contrast	Narrative
Analytical	Expository
Argumentative (Sometimes referred to as For/Against)	Persuasive

All essays are meant to be concise and based on the writer's ideas and thoughts. Because they are usually short pieces, the writer must be focused on the subject of the paper.

Research papers are meant to be a result of careful and critical research. The writer has to take the time to find all relevant information that pertain to the subject, document his or her findings, and interpret that information in the paper. By definition, the research used is the largest part of the task. If one writes a paper about the rainfall variances in the Pacific Northwest for the last 100 years, the writer must have reviewed the statistics about rainfall in that area, read many experts' opinions about the subject, and, in the paper, draw conclusions based on those statistics and the opinions.

While a research paper is based on the writer's interpretation of the information on which the writer did the research, it is the information gleaned from that research that is the foundation of each paper. The researcher/writer must examine each piece of information critically. Critical thinking means that you need to review, reflect, compare, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate each piece of information before it is included in your paper. Read the links and watch the videos on the class website to learn more about critical thinking. Then, find your OWN resources to learn more about the process!

WEB REFERENCES

"The Purdue OWL: Academic Writing." *Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)*. Web. 18 Sept. 2010. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/>.

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"A Guide for Writing Research Papers." *Capital Community College - Hartford CT - Home Page*. Web. 18 Sept. 2010. <http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>.

"Critical Thinking." *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Web. 18 Sept. 2010. <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cogsys/critthnk.html>.