# *Strategies and Techniques for Writing a Research Essay*

# Agenda

**Subtopic 1: Determining a Research Question**
- Formulating Initial Ideas and Questions
- Understanding the Criteria for the Assignment
- Constructing a Research Question
- Scope (Providing general "ideas" for the focus of the essay)

**Subtopic 2: Questions about the topic**
- Brainstorming strategies

**Subtopic 3: Gathering sources for the argument**
- BEAM [categorizing and organizing sources]
- Zotero [Aneesah Ettress, Arts and Humanities librarian]

**Subtopic 4: Consolidating ideas**
- "So-what" takeaway
- Narrowing ideas - writing a thesis and topic sentences will be possible at this stage

# Meet your presenters!

Jenna Beales (she/her, '22) Critical Theory and Social Justice
Major, Food Studies & Interdisciplinary Writing minors
Fun fact: I've done some audiobook narration work :)

Kelechi Ogbuokiri (he/him, '24)  Computer
Science Major, Sociology Minor
Fun fact: I have a Secret level security
clearance

Nicco Bartone (he/they, '24), Psychology Major, Philosophy minor
Fun fact: I know how to make lobsters fall asleep on command!

# Subtopic 1: Determining a Research Question

"What makes your paper work is a focused research question, not a narrow topic."

*(Turabian 29)*

# *Interacting with the Prompt*

**1**

**Interact with the Prompt**

**Prompt:**
Use scholarly sources and class readings to <u>analyze the impact of interventionism and argue whether or not interventionism is a harmful practice.</u>

**What to Do:**
- *Underline or highlight important information*
- *Write thoughts about the prompt in the margins*
- *Ask questions about concerning parts of the prompt*

# *Forming Initial Ideas*

**(1)** **Interact with the Prompt**

**(2)** **Brainstorm Initial Ideas and Questions**

**Prompt:**
Use scholarly sources and class readings to analyze the impact of interventionism and argue whether or not interventionism is a harmful practice.

**Ideas:**
- *It is a harmful practice because historically…*
- *What does the Professor mean by the impact of…*
- *X country was impacted in a certain way…*
- *Who does this practice affect…*
- *I know this about the topic from before…*

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# *Analyzing Criteria*

1 **Interact with the Prompt**

2 **Forming initial ideas and Questions**

3 **Analyzing the Criteria**

**Prompt:**
Use scholarly sources and class readings to analyze the impact of interventionism and argue whether or not interventionism is a harmful practice.

**Looking for Verbs:**
*Use X…*
*Analyze X…*
*Argue X…*

# Research Question

1. Interact with the Prompt

2. Forming initial ideas and Questions

3. Analyzing the Criteria

4. Constructing a more Focused Research Question

**Prompt:**
Use scholarly sources and class readings to analyze the impact of interventionism and argue whether or not interventionism is a harmful practice.

**TQS(Topic, Question, Significance) Formula:**
*T:* I am working on topic X, (What's interesting about that?)
*Q: because I want to find out Y, (So what if you do?)*
*S: so that I can help others decide what to do to fix Z.*

(Turabian 33)

# Scope and Focus

Scope refers to the breadth and complexity of the central concern of your paper.

○ Narrowing your focus (reducing scope) helps you to
- Make sure your evidence is relevant to your topic
- Make sure your body paragraphs are connected to one another

5-page paper:
No: Nature imagery in the poems of Robert Frost.
Yes: The image of snow in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

10-page paper:
No: How Plato and Aristotle's philosophies differ.
Yes: Why art that imitates life is problematic for Plato but not for Aristotle.

Examples of scope too big for any project:
Women in society
Love, death, beauty, and time in the novels of Virginia Woolf.

# How do I figure out a topic that has an appropriate scope?

**Talk to someone! Work out your ideas with a partner.**

What do I like talking about? What makes me frustrated?

When does my explanation get too sprawling?

What can they follow? What do I have trouble explaining?

How do I explain how these different topics connect to one another?

*Useful when you are hoping to clarify what the prompt requires of you and what you are interested in talking about in detail.*

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**Example**:
My topic is: The reactions of the Indian people to colonialism during the Victorian Era
○ What do I mean by "reactions?" Talk it through.
○ What do I mean by "colonialism?" Talk it through.
○ What do I mean by "the Indian people?" Talk it through.
→New Topic: The effects of English educational practices on Indian universities in the Victorian Era.

# Brainstorming to unpack the prompt

**Describe** (explain, illustrate, express, tell):
○ Give background information, content information, and analysis as necessary

**Explain** (make clear, give details):
○ Explain asks for the "how" and "why" - give clear and intelligible reasons in your explanations.

Having answers to the questions below will help you keep your argument focused even though, likely, not all of your answers will be explored in your paper.

- How does this text work? What is its argument?
- *How* is it argued (take note of supporting arguments, methodology)?
- How is the evidence used and interpreted?
- Do I agree?
- Where did I want more information and why?
- What connections and themes do I see in the text or the subject matter?
- What is the significance of the argument?
- What are the unargued assumptions?
- What might an opposing argument be?
- What does this text contribute to the argument of the book or the overall topic of this course?
- What questions do I have about the argument?
- Did the text spark related issues and topics in my mind?

# Get the most out of discussing your prompt/topic

**Review your prompt and your notes before you begin and have them at hand**

**Take notes about your ideas during the conversation you have with a partner/ask them to take notes**

- Concepts/subjects/arguments that are **continually present**

- **Disagreements** and **contradictions** in the different sources' theories, methods, and results.

- Any influential scholarship that **altered the direction**, or understanding of the research being conducted

- What do you not even enough information about? Increase your knowledge by gathering sources/researching

*Taking notes on your notes:*

Description: A brief description of the main point of the article, its purpose, and audience

Summary: A brief summary of the source and its contents

Value: What is the value of using the source in your paper? Why did you decide to use it?

- Ideas that showed up frequently

- Ideas I liked and how I thought they were connected

- I went to the WC and referred to my notes from those sessions

1. Is comic amusement socially or ==politically== valuable? If so, in what ways, and why? If not, why not?

Social value
- Creates community
- Makes us understand the ridiculous/harmful aspects of society through incongruities
- Allows us to see one another more clearly/see each other's humanity

Political value
- Have control/power over the powerful
- Satire
- Point out the ridiculous/harmful
- Make an unbearable reality more bearable
- Speaking truth to power
- Equalizes - everyone is open to criticisms

Lack of social value
- Make us more likely to enjoy distancing ourselves from real connection

Lack of political value
- Can be used to desensitize
- Can be used by those in positions of power to placate
- Keeps people from taking direct action
- Make it easier to humanize oppressors

==It could be that it is politically valuable in an environment that is entered where there exists open-mindedness and a willingness to engage in a dialogue with an opposing force.== However, humor does not change the minds of people already set in their ways and view any opposition to their mindset as a threat. Comedy is not effective when viewed as a threat. SNL and Jimmy Fallon may have done as much harm as good. Comedy can also not change the social norm when it effectively functions as an echo chamber. Because of how partisan politics in the US have become, a comedian can only appeal to one type of audience at a time.

Is someone more likely to go vote after seeing a political cartoon satirizing the current politics of the time? Or does the satire make the horror of the political environment more easily swallowed without action?

# Pre-writing helped me write the paper

- I needed to know the prevailing arguments/counter-arguments of other theorists

- I needed to know how my argument fit into those concepts

In this paper, I will explore the value of humor in politics within the United States of America. The incongruity theory of humor defines comic amusement as occurring due to perceptions of something violating our normal mental patterns or expectations of behavior with the condition that said incongruities do not stir up feelings of fear or anxiety (Carroll p. 29). Comic amusement is valuable in political discourse because it connects people. Ted Cohen, late American philosopher and author of *Jokes: Philisophical Thoughts on Laughing Matters*, viewed humor as a way of recognizing each other's humanity. If two people enjoy the same joke, then they are connected by that similarity and are able to understand one another. John Morreall, Doctor of Philosophy and author of *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*, says that comedy forms "in-groups" and "out-groups" or, in other words, that comedy forms two groups of those who like or understand a joke and those who don't. It is crucial in a democracy that communication can take place between people or groups in disagreement with one another, so the community that humor can forge between dissimilar groups is highly valuable. However, I find that the political value of humor—to unite people and facilitate open discussion where people are receptive to critiques by pointing out cognitive bugs or incongruities in conduct or principle—is prevented by the conditions of our current political environment because the two sides of the political aisle are so polarized that they are disconnected from one another and no longer open to considering the viewpoints of their rivals.

According to the incongruity theory, when we find something incongruous to be funny, we cannot feel threatened by it. Our government is increasingly split over party lines, and our populace is increasingly partisan. The ridiculous or harmful incongruities of the behavior and

- I needed examples from popular culture and secondary sources and to know how they supported my specific argument

- A thesis statement I created after brainstorming my thoughts in my pre-writing stage/outline

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# Gathering sources for your argument: **BEAM**



**B**ackground | accepted facts and concepts?

**E**vidence | support my arguments?

**A**rgument | is it in conversation with my topic?

**M**ethods | about my approach to research?

# Gathering sources for your argument: **BEAM**

**Background**
- Shared, uncontested facts and **common knowledge**
- **Foundational knowledge**
- Using a source to **provide context** so the reader can understand the rest of the paper
- Generally used in introduction to **contextualize research**

**Examples**
- Encyclopedia article
- News article
- Established prior research
- For example, in a paper arguing that deep-sea oil rigs should be phased out because of their environmental risk, citing an article about the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

**B.**

**Background**

Does it give generally accepted facts or foundational concepts in my discipline?

# Gathering sources for your argument: **BEAM**

**Evidence**
- Raw material that the author **analyzes** or **synthesizes** in their paper
- Examples used to **support claims** made in the paper
- Generally in body paragraphs and results.

**Examples**
- Quotations, paraphrashings, or other textual evidence from other texts used to support the writer's claims
- Field observations, interviews, results of questionnaire data
- Data sets, field/lab observations
- For example, in a paper arguing that a specific power plant is harmful to the surrounding ecosystem, toxicology data about the local fish population would constitute evidence

## E.

### Evidence

Is it evidence that I can use to support the arguments in my paper?

# Gathering sources for your argument: **BEAM**

**Arguments**
- Work from other scholars **addressing the same** research **question**
- Works by previous scholars you **agree with/disagree** with
- Works by previous scholars you are **building on**
- Generally found in the body paragraphs, sometimes in the intro. or literature review

**Example**
- Secondary sources about the conversation surrounding the writer's question
- Critical views and scholarly sources
- For example, in a paper arguing for the necessity of defunding the police, you might refute an article talking about the purported benefits of an increased police force

## A.

**Arguments**

Does it provide an argument about my topic that my research can be in conversation with?

# Gathering sources for your argument: **BEAM**

**Methods**

- References to the **theories or methods** the writer is employing (sometimes implicit but often explicit)
- Shows your **approach** and makes sure methods fit
- Used to determine a governing concept or manner of working
- Generally found in the methods section or referenced in the introduction/body

**Examples**

- References to critical theories or methods—feminism, new historicism, etc.
- Citations to competing theorists or theories about your research topic
- Can include research procedures, theories, and sources of discipline-specific vocabulary
- For example, if Colonialism is the **focus**, Postcolonial theory is a **method**

## M.

### Methods

Is the source about my method or approach to doing research?

# Gathering sources for your argument: Zotero

Introducing **Aneesah Ettress**!

An Oxy graduate, she earned a BA in Religious Studies with an Art History emphasis and is now our library's Arts and Humanities Specialist!

She will be talking about Zotero, a free downloadable service for managing research material

[Office number: Academic Commons 220]

# What is Zotero?

**Zotero is a free, easy-to-use tool to help you collect, organize, and cite your scholarly sources. Zotero was created by the Center for History and New Media @ George Mason University.**

Think of it as your personally curated digital library.

**Key Features:**

- Save full text pdf sources, whilst conducting your database research
- Create folders or 'collections' of your sources around a given topic, class, or assignment
- Take notes in the application
- Tag your materials using the BEAM method to create an ease of organization and discoverability
- Generate full citations from the auto imported metadata and create bibliographies
- Share your collection with a professor or friend (great for group projects)
- Don't worry about losing anything because it is stored in the cloud!

# How do I use it in my research process?

Collecting Sources
- Saving and Organizing

Interpreting Sources
- Note taking
- Tagging

Citations
- Generating citations and works cited or bibliographies
  - Citation metadata does not import perfectly every time!

# Great, now how do I access it?

1.  Downloading Zotero is fairly intuitive, visit zotero.org and follow the step by step instructions.
2.  Make sure you register and set up an account
3.  To ensure that you have all of the correct settings in place follow this libguide that Oxy made for Zotero https://libguides.oxy.edu/Zotero (there is video documentation as well)
4.  If you are still having trouble, talk with me after this session or book an individual consultation at libcal.oxy.edu

*Subtopic 4: Consolidating Ideas*

Do It Through StoryBoarding the Research Paper!

# StoryBoarding

1. **Research Question:**
   Keep in mind the TQS(Topic, Question, Significance) formula when forming the Question
2. **Hypothesis:**
   Based on background information and sources gathered, what is your hypothesis for the answer to the question
3. **Reason:**
   State the reason this hypothesis holds
4. **Evidence:**
   Use evidence to support this hypothesis
5. **Opposing Opinion:**
   Present an opposing side
6. **Response:**
   Provide evidence that contradicts this point

*(Example StoryBoard)*

Question:

Hypothesis:
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Reason(s):
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Evidence:
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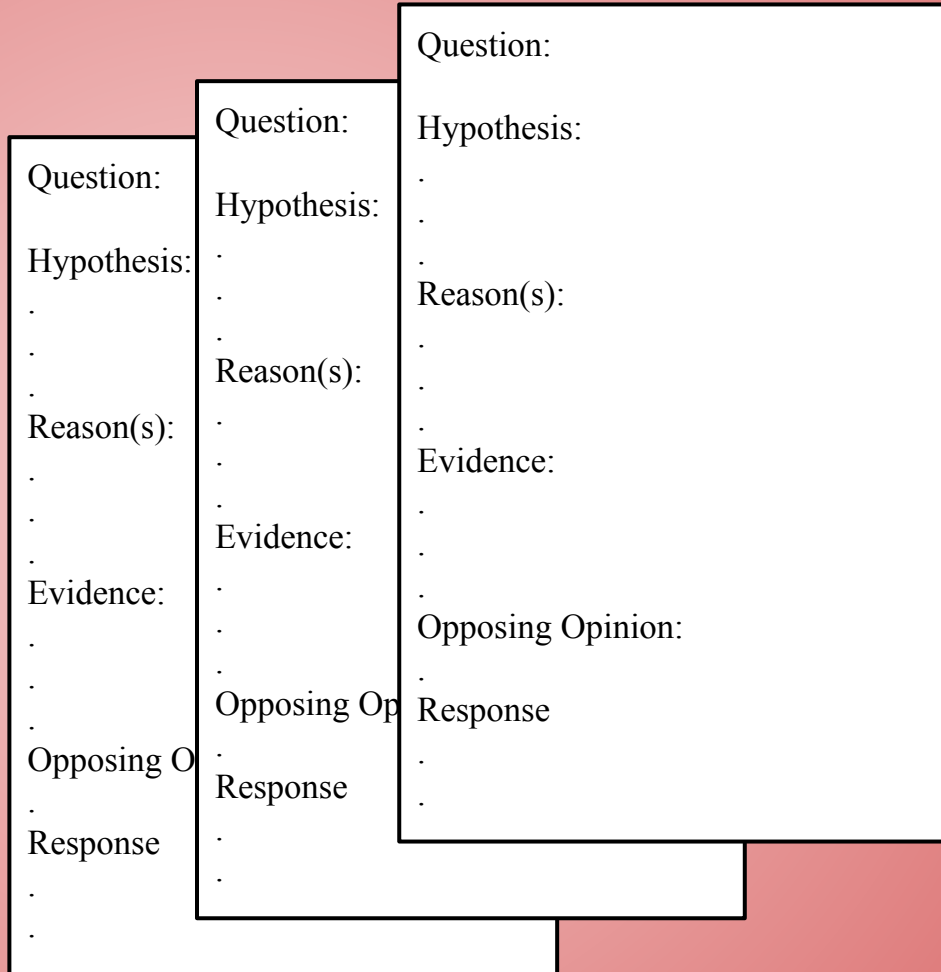.
.
Opposing Opinion:
.
Response
.
.

# Narrowing the Focus of the Paper

**GOAL:**
Create Multiple Storyboards to better understand your **Argument**, the **"So What"**, and the **Relevance of the Sources**

What are the consequences of my argument? Does it impact the way one might understand the topic in question? ("so what")

Question:

Hypothesis:
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Reason(s):
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Evidence:
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Opposing Opinion:
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Response

Question:

Hypothesis:
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Reason(s):
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Evidence:
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Opposing Opinion:
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Response

Question:

Hypothesis:
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Reason(s):
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Evidence:
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Opposing Opinion:
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Response

# Our Writing Center Hours!

Nicco: Sunday (6-8 pm) and Wednesday (4-6 pm)

Kelechi: Tuesday (6-8 pm) and Thursday (6-8 pm)

Jenna: Tuesday (8-10 pm)