

First-Year Seminar (Wilson Section)

Thesis Statement for Research Paper

(Due at the start of class on Monday, September 14, 2015)

It is time to sharpen our paper research paper topics after our initial discussions and library/web instruction. Here are additional guidelines to focus your research subjects:

1. Your topic will be something at the margins of rationality, or fully within the irrational. This is our course theme. The concepts inherent in what humans believe and why must be the primary motivation behind your research. All topics must therefore be within the realm of nonsense or *perceived* nonsense. (Maybe astrology *really* works, eh?)
2. Your topic must be defined narrowly enough that you can successfully pursue a thesis in 15-20 pages. This means you should be able to present a set of ideas, support them with evidence derived from the literature, and then draw distinct conclusions.
3. Here is the assignment description from our course website: “Early in the semester you will choose some aspect of pseudoscience, conspiratorial history, medical quackery or the like to be your specialty in the class. The first thing you will do is collect resources on the topic (naturally) and then give me an annotated bibliography so I know you are on track. At the end of the course you will present your findings to the class and turn in a paper 15-20 pages long or so. We will talk about this Research Paper assignment every week, include subject choice, paper format, and oral presentation styles.”

Here is your next assignment: First, please write **a title and a one-paragraph thesis statement** for your research paper and submit it to me in class on Monday, September 14th. Here is an example I just made up:

My research paper title is: “Why Scientology is a Profit-Making Cult and Not a Legitimate Religion”. My thesis is that Scientology has its origins in the imagination of a science fiction writer who conceived a way to attract followers with pseudoscientific self-help techniques under the gloss of a false authority. He then learned he could charge ever-increasing amounts of money for these insights. By adding religious motifs and an ecclesiastical hierarchy, Scientology gained still more adherents, millions of dollars of assets, and tax-exempt status in the United States. It may have the outer appearance of a religion, but Scientology remains a coercive cult dedicated to further enriching its officers. Scientology should no longer be considered a religion under the US tax code, and its accounting books should be open to public inspection.

Second, please list **five references**, which can include webpages AND at least one journal or otherwise professional article. Again, they must follow the format below:

Black Ops. July 25, 2015. Astronomer Demonstrates Why NASA Pluto Images Are a Hoax. <http://chemtrailsplanet.net/2015/07/25/astronomer-demonstrates-why-nasa-pluto-images-are-a-hoax/> Accessed August 25, 2015.

Johnson, A.K. 1993. The use of hypnosis in gerbils. *The Animal Psychologist* 23: 12-24.

Nogueira, F. 2015. Myths about Nutrition. *Skeptical Briefs* 25.1.
http://www.csicop.org/sb/show/myths_about_nutrition/ Accessed August 25, 2015.

This thesis statement and the five references are due to me in writing at the beginning of class on Monday, **September 14th**. This is a graded assignment (one of your “short papers”). Part of your grade will be based on whether you followed the instructions completely, including the format of the references.