

Final Project Intro Script

Hello! This is Dr. Grover, the course coordinator for English 306B.

This week, you're wrapping up your Unit 1 Project, the Business Correspondence Portfolio. And though it may seem early for this, we're actually going to be looking ahead to your final projects in this class to get you started thinking about topics you might write about.

But first, let's talk about research papers. I'm sure you're familiar with research papers and that you've written a few of them in your time as a student. You know what I'm talking about—they are usually the big final project of a writing course, and you have to have x number of sources and y number of pages, and you put off starting until way too late and then have to stay up all night just to put something half-sensible together, and it always feels like a near-random mishmash of quotes and paraphrases from a bunch of quasi-related articles you found by doing the least amount of research possible, and you're not really sure what the paper's purpose in the world is other than enabling you to pass the class that it's for. That research paper.

And if you're like me, maybe you've wondered why we write research papers in school when no one seems to write research papers in the real world. I mean, where are all the research papers? What job is it that requires one to write these research papers that we've been practicing all through school? Do doctors write them? Bankers? Architects? Engineers? Nurses? Bus drivers?

Well, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but research papers—at least of the type you've been learning to write all through elementary, middle, and high school as well as college—don't exist in the real world. Or, at least, they don't exist in the form you're familiar with.

So what form do they take?

To answer that question, let's imagine you grow up and become a professional, working in an office or somewhere, with employees below you and management above you. You notice a problem—maybe an office procedure is not as efficient as it could be, or maybe the chain of communication between teams is breaking down, or maybe the way your company handles clients leads to breakdowns and lost business. You want to solve the problem, but it isn't exactly your jurisdiction, or solving it will require resources—time and money—that you don't have. Either way, you'll have to talk to your boss about what's going on if you want to get the issue resolved. What do you do?

For simple, obvious problems, you might just talk tactfully to your boss and that's it. But let's say that the nature of the problem is such that your boss won't be easily convinced the problem exists, or that it is as damaging or urgent as you think it is. Or let's say that your boss agrees that the problem is real and needs to be solved, but disagrees about the solution or disagrees that you're the one who should implement it, or is hesitant about devoting so much time and money and effort to its solution. In such cases, you need to present your case in a stronger, more carefully constructed, more convincing way.

Enter the research paper. Or rather, enter the analytic business report. A business report is just like a research paper in that it relies on research to make it convincing. The use and presentation of carefully gathered data proves that you aren't just making things up, that you know what you're talking about. Just like a research paper, an analytic report is an argument—it recommends a course of action—and it relies on evidence (that is, research) to support that argument.

Unlike a research paper, however, an analytic business report doesn't show up for class in pajama pants and a tank top, sleepy-eyed and bed-headed. It dresses up in its most professional attire so as to inspire confidence in its author. And because it respects the time and attention of its readers, it makes itself as user-friendly as possible by logically laying out its information in sections and subsections with sensible headings. And lastly, because it knows it might be read by multiple readers with different needs for detail and depth, it might include things like an executive summary at the outset for those who just need the big picture fast, a table of contents for those who need to skip directly to a relevant section, and possibly an appendix or two for those wanting to dig deep into the data before committing to its recommendations.

In other words, an analytic business report is a research paper that has grown up and graduated from college, ready to make its mark on the actual real world.

Since this is almost certainly the final required writing class of your educational career, it makes sense that your final project in this final class will be an analytic business report.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Your Unit 4 project will be a Final Project Proposal, in which you'll pitch your idea for your Unit 5 project, which will be an analytic business report that identifies and proposes a solution for a problem an organization faces.

Let's go more into detail about what the final project entails so that you have a clear idea of where you're headed. Your final writing project for this course is a formal business report in which you will

- specify a real organization you have worked in/with
- identify a real problem or situation within that organization that needs addressing
- recommend a course of action to solve or ameliorate the problem

Your final report will

- be 2000 words long (give or take 10%)
- be targeted to a specific decision-making audience within the organization
- use at least one visual you composed yourself (such as a graph, diagram, or table)
- use evidence to make your case, including primary and secondary research and at least one scholarly source
- cite sources appropriately according to MLA, APA, or Chicago style
- be formatted as appropriate for a professional business document (i.e., block formatting, etc.)

I know that sounds like a lot, but by starting early and taking it one step at a time, you'll find that it is eminently achievable. As of right now, the only things you need to even consider are identifying an organization you want to focus on and a problem faced by that organization. This week's readings and activities will get you started.