

Final Project for Com 386

Purpose: The purpose of the final paper is to apply the material we have learned by completing a research project of interest to you. Going through the research writing process will be beneficial and a different method of application than activities and testing.

Process: For this assignment you will complete the following steps

1. *Choose a topic of interest to you and write a research question.* We will do some brainstorming in class and I recommend you think about your future goal. Will it be likely that you'll do some content analyses at a future job that you can practice? Will you be doing some survey work and what kind? Create a research question.
2. *Research the Topic.* Before beginning data collection you will need to do some research on your topic. What is known? What is unknown? How have researchers approached the topic in the past? This will be a section in your final paper, so take notes in the process.
3. *Decide how to approach the research.* For this course you will most likely complete either a content analysis or survey research. The method you use will be determined by your research question/hypotheses.
4. *Data Collection.* Data will be collected through first-hand research or by utilizing secondary data such as the General Social Survey. Data will be entered or transferred into SPSS and organized for analysis.
5. *Data Analysis.* The type of data analysis you conduct will also be determined by the questions you are asking. By the time we are analyzing your data you should be familiar enough with common tests to choose what fits your research best.
6. *Draw Conclusions.* In your paper you need to explain your results—what do they mean? Why are they important? How do they contribute to previous findings? If applicable, what are the implications for practitioners in the field you are working?
7. *Written Report.* Your final report will include all major sections of a research project and will be written in APA style. The final paper should end up being approximately 15-18 pages *excluding* references, figures, and tables.

Format of Written Report: Again, the final paper will need to be in APA format (see Moodle for helpful links and resources). Sections will include:

- Introduction and Background (1-2 pages)
 - o This is where you introduce the topic and current research. You should provide some background in order to justify looking into the topic.
- Literature Review (2-3 pages)
 - o Review of relevant academic literature that will explain how the topic has been approached in the past and why it is important. This review will also build justification for your method.
- Research Questions and/or Hypotheses (.5 page)
 - o Based on your topic and review of literature, what are the guiding research questions and/or hypotheses?
- Method (3-4 pages)

- The method section will be a detailed account of each step of the data process including sampling, procedures, variables collected (and why), and the data analysis that you will use.
- Results (3-5 pages)
 - This section provides the result of each test you run. You will do this by research question and hypothesis. For each question/hypothesis, you will briefly explain the test you ran, the results of the test, and, if applicable, whether your hypothesis was supported or not.
- Discussion (2-4 pages)
 - In the discussion section you will summarize the results and explain their significance. What do they mean? Why are they important? How do they contribute to previous findings? If applicable, what are the implications for practitioners in the field you are working?
 - Also include a section on limitations and directions for future research.
- Conclusion (.5-1 page)
 - Briefly and succinctly wrap up the research paper and end on a note that underlines the importance of the project.
- References
- Figures and Tables (not included in page count)

Grading*: Your final paper will be graded based upon the following rubric:

1. Solid **introduction** and justification for investigation into the topic (10 points)
2. **Literature review** appropriate in scope, explained clearly, and explicitly supports the need for your current project (10 points)
3. **RQs and Hs** derive from the literature review and topic (5 points)
4. **Method** for research is justified and thoroughly explained to the point that someone else could easily replicate it (15 points)
5. **Data collection** was thoughtful, justified, rigorous, and fully explained (15 points)
6. Proper tests were run and the **results** section fully explains the tests and outcomes (20 points)
7. **Discussion and conclusion** are thorough and provide meaning to the results (15 points)
8. **Figures and/or tables helpful** and readable (10 points)

Other requirements that may affect your grade:

9. All required material turned in, including your data set, code book (if applicable), and any other data collection materials.
10. Adherence to **APA style** throughout paper

*You may wish to work with someone who has similar interests as you. You may work in a group of no more than 3 individuals. Each person in the group **must** contribute to each section, though. This is particularly important for data collection and analysis. If you work in a group you will be required to submit anonymous reports regarding each group member's contributions. Please note that your grade may be adjusted based on these reports.