

Essay III: The Research Project

Your third essay will be a brief investigation of an aspect of consumer culture that interests you (**8-9 pages of text**, plus a Works Cited page). You can think of this as a short research essay or as a piece of investigative journalism.

The assignment has several parts:

- 1) Find a topic that interests you, and frame it as a question. You'll include this question in the introduction of your essay, and it will help shape your discussion. I've listed sample topics below in question form.
- 2) Research your topic. I expect you to cite a minimum of 6 sources, at least 2 of which must be books or journals (either in print or electronic format). I will ask you for an Annotated Bibliography before the first draft is due, to help you determine whether your sources are appropriate.
- 3) Collect information; take notes. Be sure quotes are complete and accurate. We will discuss quoting and paraphrasing in class before the first draft is due.
- 4) Write your first draft. In your Introduction, make sure you provide your reader with some context for the question you're investigating: Why are you interested in this topic? Why might we be interested in it? Organize the body of your essay just as you would any essay—that is, don't just tell your readers one thing after another, but shape the way you provide information and, perhaps, ask further questions. In your conclusion, try not to close a door—"See what I just proved"—but open a window for further thinking on your topic. After you've written the draft, you should have a clear idea of your thesis, which you can then add to your Introduction.
- 5) Cite sources in conformity with MLA style within the text and provide a Works Cited at the end.

You will also give a short oral presentation based on your project (description to come).

Sample topics

Topics for this paper may be drawn from any aspect of consumer culture—economic, psychological, cultural, historical, and so on. Because this is a short paper, you'll want to investigate a narrowly focused question. A few possibilities:

What is the rationale for MIT's Open Course Ware, and how does it fit with the consumer-oriented economic approach of most higher education in America?

When did the move to protect consumers begin, and what forms does it currently take in the U.S.? —e.g., what is the Consumers Union?

What is sustainable development?

What are students taught about credit and debt in high school? What are the biggest problems with credit card debt among teenagers and young adults?

How are products marketed in elementary and/or secondary schools, and what are the implications for education?

What resources exist for acquainting immigrant families with the economics of shopping? How are these resources accessed?

What kinds of programs for media literacy, specifically regarding awareness of advertising, exist in American high schools (and middle schools)? How widespread are they?

How do measures for consumer protection differ in the U.S. and elsewhere?

How much money is spent on advertising in the U.S. in a given industry, and how is that cost passed on to consumers?

How do psychologists describe differences between men's and women's approaches to shopping?
What are the implications?

What part of the U.S. economy does the entertainment industry account for?

How does the need to attract viewers (audiences for ads) affect presentation and coverage of news?

How has the model of "consumer culture" affected health care in the U.S.?

What is the Fair Trade Movement?

What is the Consumer Price Index, and what purpose does it serve?

What role do shopping malls play as civic and cultural spaces?

What are the psychological effects of advertising on young people?

What are the aims and effectiveness of anti-consumerist or anti-globalization movements?

Deadlines for Essay III

Topic: A day after Class #9.

Annotated Bibliography (format to come): A Day after Class #11.

1st Draft: Class #17.

Revision: Class # 24.

Final revision (optional): with Portfolio, a day after Class #26.

Oral Presentations are the last 3-4 classes; we'll have sign-ups for each date.