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Essay 1: Media Across Time

The purpose of this assignment is to give you experience in thinking about media history in a personal way. The goal is to help you think about media in the past subjectively, relating it to the lives of real people like you or members of your family.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT:

Interview someone from another generation (at least 30 years older than you) about their media use *when they were the age you are now*. The idea is to discover the role media played in their lives when they were your age. In your paper, explain *in detail* what year you are talking about (so if you're now 21 and you're interviewing your mom, you need to say what year she turned 21). Try to keep the interview focused on that *one year*, not more than that.

There are three parts to your interview.

Part I: Before the interview—Studying the time period

Talk with your prospective interviewee to determine the year you will be dealing with. Don't rely completely on your source's memory. Prior to the interview, investigate the time period involved so that you have some basic idea of historical context. Following the interview, note any discrepancies you find between your source's recollection and the facts you have discovered.

Part II: During the interview—Exploring media usage during the time period

Once you and your interviewee have determined the year, during the interview itself:

- Ask your interviewee what significant events she remembers from that year and the impact those events had on her life. (I'm assuming the female pronoun here for grammatical simplicity. You may interview anyone you like.)
- How did she learn about these events and others that were going on in the world?
- How did she communicate with friends?
- From what sources did she get her entertainment?
- How did media help define her generation and who they became as individuals?
- Finally, ask her how her experience during that time period compares to her experience with media today and what she thinks of the differences.

Part III: Following the interview—Analysis and comparison

- Explain what you have learned about the role media play in shaping our lives.
- How does this shed light on your own, personal experiences with media now?

PAPER REQUIREMENTS:

- This should be written in an essay form. That means, it's a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and a logical progression from one part to the other. You could think of it as a feature article as well. See the information included in this document for some guidelines.
 - Because this involves an interview, including quotations will make your essay more interesting than just recounting what someone says in your own words.
 - Be sure all questions asked by the assignment are answered.
 - Grammar and spelling count. So does proper style.
 - Your finished essay should be 3-4 pages, double spaced (approximately 1200-1300 words). Your word count should be close to the recommended length or you will lose points.
 - This paper does not call for extensive research, but you should cite sources that you do use *at the end of your paper* using an acceptable style such as APA or Chicago.
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STYLE GUIDE:

*This guide is provided in order to limit the number of obvious errors that tend to recur in student papers. Because you have been provided with this in advance, errors noted here that occur in your paper **will result in an automatic 5-point deduction from your grade**, regardless of how well-reasoned or interesting your paper is. If your paper is full of errors, your final grade will reflect that as well as the 5-point deduction.*

Also note that some of these suggestions will apply more specifically to the second essay assignment in this class. They are important nonetheless.

NOTE: These suggestions apply only to *your* writing in this essay. There is no need to edit direct quotes from your interviewee.

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Class assignments are *not* written in AP style; therefore, the names of newspapers, books, magazines, and radio/television shows should be in *italics*. (i.e., *USA Today*, *The New York Times*)

Pronoun-antecedent agreement:

Instead of fretting over which pronoun to use to reference an antecedent noun, we will subscribe to the guidelines set down by *The Washington Post*:

It is usually possible, and preferable, to recast sentences as plural to avoid both the sexist and antiquated universal default to male pronouns and the awkward use of he or she, him or her and the like: "Journalists should never disclose their sources," not "A journalist should never disclose his or her sources."

When such a rewrite is impossible or hopelessly awkward, however, what is known as "the singular they" is permissible: "Everyone has their own opinion about the traditional grammar rule." The singular they is also useful in references to people who identify as neither male nor female.

Other options if you don't want to use "they" as singular pronoun:

Pick a pronoun and stick with it, or vary it, using the masculine alternating with the feminine (unless you're referring to the same person each time).

- A *journalist* should never disclose *her* sources.
- A *journalist* should never lie to *his* readers.

The least desirable option is to use his/her, he/she, s/he, or some other derivation of that approach. It is usually, but not always, awkward, and, if repeated too many times, just sounds silly.

Typical errors in history papers:

- There is no apostrophe in constructions such as 1970s, 1980s, the 70s, the 80s.
- “Media” is the plural form of “medium.” If you’re talking about newspapers, TV, radio, etc., then it’s always “media.” If, however, you’re talking about a single form of media—“the medium of television”—then it’s singular. The word “mediums” would be a gathering of people who talk to ghosts. Remember to use the correct verb form with the plural: “the media *are*,” or “the media *have*.”
- The past tense of *broadcast* is *broadcast*, not *broadcasted*.
- Using the correct verb form when writing about the past is tricky business. You may use either past or present tense, or something called “conditional perfect.” Just pick one and stick to it. For example:
 - “We *listened* to the radio every day.”
 - This means you are talking about something that happened in the past as someone who is writing about that time from any time in the future, as in—“When I lived at home in 1940, before going to college, we *listened* to the radio every day. Now I don’t have as much time, so I rarely *listen* to it.”
 - “We *listen* to the radio every day.”
 - This is most effectively used to give the reader a sense that you are actually living in that past time and is a much-used stylistic device. For example—“I *rush* home every day from work to *listen* to my favorite radio show.”
 - “We *would have listened* to the radio every day.”
 - This keeps you in the present while imagining living in the past. For example—“If I had lived in 1940, I *would have listened* to the radio every day.”
- We all suffer from colloquialisms such as:
 - “This paper is based *off of* my interest in the Jazz Age.”
The correct grammatical construction would be
 - “This paper is based *on* my interest in the Jazz Age.”
 - Other common colloquialisms include *being as* or *seeing as* instead of *because*.
 - “*Being as* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”
The correct form would be:
 - “*Because* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”

Another option:

- “*Since* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”

Another common colloquialism is using *anyways* instead of *anyway*.

- “The radio was a better form of entertainment *anyways*.”
 - *Anyways* is not a word. *Anyway* is the correct usage.
- *Theater* is the accepted American spelling. *Theatre* is the British form. Use American English forms.
 - While we’re on the subject of theaters, until nearly the 1970s, theatrical films were generally referred to as “movies” or “shows” in the U.S., and especially before the 1960s (i.e., “we went to the movies” or “we went to the show”). “Cinema” in recent years has come to refer both to the process of filmmaking and the building in which films are shown. This is a more modern construction and shouldn’t be used if you are speaking from the past.
 - In general try to use the language from the time you are writing about. For example, news stories weren’t “posted,” they were printed, published, or broadcast. Or, records were “put on,” as in “I put on Bing Crosby and relaxed to the mellow sounds.” They weren’t “put in” or “inserted” as with CDs. Of course, if you’re living in 1970, you would “put in” a cassette tape.

Use of quotation marks: (pretty much everyone has trouble with this.)

- Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.
- If a question is in quotation marks, the question mark should be placed inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

She asked, “Will you still be my friend?” (In this case, the quoted question is at the end of the sentence, so no further punctuation is needed.)

Do you agree with the saying, “All’s fair in love and war”? (Here the question mark is outside the quote because the sentence itself is the question, not the quote.)

- Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. Note that the period goes inside all quote marks.

Example: He said, “Julie said, ‘Do not treat me that way.’”

- Single quotes are *never* used to replace double quotes unless used as in the previous example.

HOW TO WRITE AN INTERVIEW ESSAY

An interview essay is designed to give a general impression of the interview subject to the reader and to present his or her thoughts on a select group of topics. A good interview essay should make the reader feel as though he or she were asking the questions. The following steps cover how to plan and write an interview essay.

Decide what format your interview essay will have. Interview essays can be in one of two formats:

- Narrative format. This form allows paraphrasing of some information the interviewee says, along with direct quotes for the material you most want to emphasize.
- Conversational format. This is a looser format than the formal writing style required for most essays. You can address the reader directly and use both first and second person.

Arrange the interview. You'll need to contact the interviewee to arrange a time and place to conduct the interview. You'll also need permission to record the interview with audio equipment. Be sure the person you contact knows who you are and why you want to interview him or her.

Choose a quiet place with few distractions for your interview site. A library, restaurant, or quiet campus location would be suitable. You may want to get the interviewee's consent to use his or her comments in your essay in writing, as well as permission to record those comments during the interview.

It's helpful to have a backup interviewee in case the person you plan to interview can't make it. Be on time at the place you've agreed to meet for the interview.

Conduct the interview. Even if you are using a recording device, take notes during the interview, as they can help you look for specific points in the recording to incorporate into the essay. Also write down your thoughts and impressions about the interview and interviewee. They may help you shape the essay.

Writing the Interview Essay

Plan an outline of the essay. Review your notes and the essay recording to craft an outline of what information your essay will cover and where it will appear. One possible outline could be an introduction that starts with an anecdote about the interviewee and then presents your thesis statement, several key points, and a conclusion that summarizes the information presented.

Develop a thesis statement. What your thesis statement will be depends on the purpose of your interview essay. If the purpose of your essay is only to present your interviewee to your reader, your thesis will be a brief summary identifying the person, his or her background, accomplishments, and qualifications. If the purpose of your essay is to use your interviewee's comments to explore a topic, your thesis will be a statement of that topic. What you present about your interviewee's background will be those elements of the person's background that illuminate your topic.

Write your first draft.

Document any sources used besides your interview. This is necessary only if you have cited material from any sources other than the interviewee in writing your paper. Use the same citation format as you would for any other type of essay.

Use your interviewee's words. Use a mix of quotations and paraphrase to make your story flow. After all, the interview is the main focus of the essay.

Revise your draft. Review your own writing to improve its content, style, and grammar, and have someone else look it over also, if possible.
