Writing a Research Paper

Thesis Statement or Research Question(s):

One of the most important elements is that you have a focus in your paper. By coming up with at least an idea of a thesis or RQs it will help you to come up w/ an outline. This focus should come by asking a specific research question(s) and then trying to answer it or by making a thesis statement and then supporting or refuting it through your research.

You must be specific here. “How have women been represented in music video?” is WAY too general. However, “How were African American females represented in 1990s rap videos and what are the continuities and discontinuities in 2012?”

Or, you could have a seemingly vague topic that is quite specific: “A formalist analysis of three Spike Jonze directed Beastie Boys' music videos,” or “A comparative and formalist analysis of Nine Inch Nail's 'Closer' music video and the photography of Joel-Peter Whitkins.” These are topics, and from such topics you derive a thesis statement or RQs.

You may start with a broad question/thesis in the outline stage, but you will NEED to get specific.

If you have a thesis statement, you may write “This paper explores the evolving representation of African American females in rap music videos, and suggests that these representations are the bi-product of white male fantasies.” Something like that. Then you would find some case studies, theories, other related research, and show support or deny the thesis (sometimes finding that your thesis was actually wrong is better than proving that you were right!!!).

Outline:

Once you have some RQs or thesis statement, consider how you will layout your paper.

The typical sections of a research paper are: introduction, context or background information, literature review/theory, findings, and then conclusion/discussion. Within these sections your may also have sub-sections. For instance, within your findings section maybe you have 3 case studies or you have a couple logical findings groups that should be put in their own subsections.

Once you have an idea, make some sort of outline that works for you. This can be anything, but try and use the aforementioned sections/subsections to help structure this. I like to lay out my outline using the sections/subsections and then put bullet points underneat. These bullet points may be quotes from academics or artists, paraphrases, or my own ideas or points of analysis. Maybe each bullet point will become a paragraph in the section/subsection.

Organization:

Okay, organization is key. You can have a great paper content-wise but poorly organized. The outline will help here. But, I strongly recommend headers and sub-headers that clearly mark your sections/subsections. For instance, maybe you choose to have the <u>Findings:</u> header underlined and then your subsections italicized, *Queen Latifah and Afro-Centrism*:. Definitely be consistent here and label all your sections/subsections.

When actually writing, I also strongly recommend that you have transition sentences between sections/subsections. For instance, “Now that key theories have been fleshed out, the next section of this paper will explore the representation of blackness, beginning with an analysis of Queen Latifah's music videos.” So, this will transition into the <u>Findings:</u> section; you will

want a paragraph out two detailing the structure of your findings and hitting on key points before you move into your findings *Sub-Sections*.

Okay, so what should be in these sections??? Here is what I think.

Introduction: Write this last!!! Sounds backwards right? Your introduction should be a short few paragraphs that present your RQs or thesis statement, make a general claim to what you found and why it's important, and maybe briefly outline the structure of the paper. You can start it off straight to the point ("This paper examines..."), with some sort of relevant story, or a relevant quotation.

Context or Background Information: Here is where you present us with general information. Maybe, staying w/ the Queen Latifah example, about her background as an artist in both film and music/music video, her activism, etc. If you are looking at a director or band, same thing. Present information here that the reader should know to help contextualize the research, but information that is not central to your thesis/RQs although it provides a foundation for the writing to come. This could include relevant socio-economic info, historical info, etc. Here is where you could also present info that you find in the popular press (magazines, blogs, newspapers, etc., which are sources that may give you info for your findings sections as well) about the subject you are examining.

Literature Review: Here present any relevant theory(ies) or prior academic work relevant to your topic. Summarize or quote these authors, but make your choices here count. Look at some of the works that we read this term, films we watched, and then look for some other academic sources in the Library, such as books, edited volumes, and academic journal articles. These can be general or specific. Maybe you find a great feminist theorist and include the author's general theory in this review, and maybe you find something else written that directly pertains to your work. Maybe a great academic article that looks at editing technique as it relates to audience experience. Google Scholar is good or ask the library people to maybe help you.

Findings: Here is where you will lay out what you found. Some analysis here is okay, but try and leave most analytical points for the conclusion/discussion. If you do a deep read of a few music videos, try to show us the element of your textual analysis but save the deep analytical points for the end (I think making general and broader analytical points here is fine and essential).

This section should be about 40% of your paper. Present any info here that directly relates to your thesis or your RQs. If you have research questions, maybe a *Sub-Section* to answer each RQ; if you have one RQ or a thesis, look at the logical components within and break into subsections.

Conclusion/Discussion: This is the part I'm very interested in...What does it all mean? Why should we care? Who does it matter and does it matter? You don't answer these questions directly, but indirectly. Typically the discussion and conclusion are separate, but I sometimes morph them into one.

Here is where you analyze the findings in relation to the theory and you make analytical points. This is where you synthesize all the elements of the paper. What do your finding suggest? How does this relate to theory? Was your thesis proven, disproved, or a bit of both? Remember, any statements of analytical points must directly relate to what you have shown the reader in previous sections. Relate your findings to the course materials presented in Weeks 1-6, which you may consider including in our literature review (only if these materials fit). Basically, bring all the separate sections of your paper together here!

What I'm interested in seeing here is how you synthesize the course with a topic of your

interest. While you may not enjoy writing a paper, hopefully choosing a topic of your interest will help fuel you.

Reference Page/Bibliography: Since this is a research paper, you MUST cite the works used. Follow a citation style for citation in the body of your writing and on this page where you list out (alphabetically) your sources. Here are a few options for citation style:

Chicago
MLA
APA

Titling:

After writing this you should come up with a title. The typical research format is something catchy followed by a colon and the more academic statement. For instance, *"What it means to the be the Queen: A formalist feminist analysis of Queen Latifah's music videos."* Okay, think about that!

Some Do's and Don't's:

- For more grammar/style guidelines, please see the guide for style/grammar in this class.
- DO NOT USE first person: I, my, me, etc. Although I like the insertion of the author into research, it's generally thought of as unacceptable. Therefore, I would like you to avoid it here as well. Instead of "I think..." or "my idea is..." please use other phraseology: "the research suggests," "formalist analysis shows," "Through a feminist analysis we see how," "the findings here reveal how," "deconstructing the representation of boyhood shows us the ways in which," and so forth.
- CITE EVERYTHING! If you paraphrase an author or source, cite it; if you quote someone, cite it; if you use someone else's idea, even vaguely, cite it!
- USE PARAGRAPHS: My lord. If I have to see another full-page with no indented paragraphs on it I will go ape!!! Not only is this hard to read, but it is bad writing structure. Typically, a "thought" or, as I say, "thought nugget," should have its own paragraph. If you start writing this long, drawn out paragraph, likely you can go back and break it into logical paragraphs, typically 3-5 sentences.
- SHOW DON'T TELL. Eww, I hate this phrase but it's true. The reader needs to be able to understand what you're talking about. "Queen Latifah's music videos present the viewers with consumable notions of blackness in three different ways..." and then describe (show) us.