

Chapter Eleven

Alternative Ways to Present Your Research

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Not All Research Comes in “Papers” or Essays”

In Chapter Ten, “The Research Essay,” I describe the process for writing a conventional research essay. While research essay writing tasks vary quite a bit, there are some general guidelines that you will want to consider when you are asked by a college professor to write a “research paper” or “research essay.”

Of course, the traditional essay form (typed, double-spaced, thesis-driven, written in a linear “from beginning to end” style) is still the most common writing assignment in college classrooms, and this will probably remain the case for some time to come. Increasingly however, college teachers are considering alternatives to this form. Some of these alternatives have actually been common in composition classes for a while now-- for example, the “I-Search” research essay (which was pioneered by Ken Macrorie in the late 1980s) and portfolio-based writing projects and assessments.



Others alternatives are more recent. The increased power and availability of computer technology has played a significant role in presenting research in a way that is different from the conventional essay. For example, the World Wide Web allows (some might even say *requires*) writers to publish documents that include graphics and photographs, and even audio and video files.

In some ways, these alternatives to the research essay still have the same basic requirements that I've discussed in all the previous chapters in *The Process of Research Writing*. After all, you are still trying to convince and inform an audience about a particular point, and you do this with your use and interpretation of evidence.

In other ways, presenting your research in an alternative fashion and with alternative sorts of evidence change in interesting ways the role and place in research in both academic and non-academic settings. Besides that, writing about your research in a "non-traditional" way might shed a different and informative light on your topic, and it might even be fun.

Obviously, there is no limit to the number of alternatives and variations to the traditional research essay. In this chapter, I will describe three ways of approaching research writing differently: The research portfolio/narrative essay, the Web-based research project, and the poster session project. These projects could be completed either along with or instead of a more traditional research essay, and I would also encourage you to experiment and explore other alternatives and combinations of projects.

The Research Portfolio/Narrative Essay

A "research portfolio" is a collection of writing you've done in the process of completing your research. Of course, the details about what is included in this portfolio will vary based on the class assignments. However, if you've been following through the exercises in Part Two of this textbook, chances are your portfolio will consist of some combination of these projects:

- The topic proposal exercise
- The critique exercise
- The antithesis exercise
- The categorization and evaluation exercise
- The annotated bibliography exercise

A research portfolio might also include your work on some of the various exercises in *The Process of Research Writing* and other assignments given to you from your teacher.

The goal of the exercises in Part II of this book is to help you work through the process of research writing, and to help you write an essay along the lines of what I describe in Chapter Ten, "The Research Essay." However, as an



alternative to using this previous work to write a research essay, you could write an essay about these exercises to tell the story of researching your topic.

This project, “The Research Portfolio/Narrative Essay” is similar to a more conventional research essay in that the writer uses cited evidence to support the point exemplified in a working thesis. However, it is different in that the writer focuses on the *process* of researching his topic, a narrative about how he developed and explored the working thesis.

The Assignment

Write a seven to ten page narrative essay about the process of working through the previously assigned exercises in the class. Be sure to explain to your audience-- your teacher, classmates, and other readers interested in your topic-- the steps you took to first develop and then work through your research project.

A Student Example: “The Story of My Working Thesis Malfunction” by Amanda Kenger

In the course where Amanda wrote this essay, students were given the option to either follow the Chapter Ten assignment for writing a more “conventional” research essay, or to write a research portfolio/narrative essay following the assignment described in this chapter. Amanda said that she originally chose to write a portfolio/narrative essay because “I thought it would be a piece of cake. I was wrong.” She soon realized that this assignment required her to think carefully about how to present her research to her readers, and it required her to follow an approach that was different from her previous academic writing experiences. Overall, Amanda was glad she chose this writing option “because it gave me an opportunity to do something out of the ordinary.”



The Story of My Working Thesis Malfunction

When we were first given the assignment for the final research project, I was sure that I was going to write a traditional research paper. I have done all of the research, written out the annotated bibliography, and have created a fairly decisive working thesis. However, I finally decided to work through the research portfolio essay option after looking at the work I created during the semester and realizing how much things have changed from start to finish.

I wrote four essays that examine my thesis and my sources and my working thesis changed with each essay. It transformed from my original idea that three events in history changed television censorship to my final working thesis, "Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl wardrobe malfunction has changed the way that Americans view television."

Each of the essays I wrote has had an effect on my final working thesis. This is especially surprising for me because previously, when I came up with an idea or a thesis, my mind is usually made up. But I think that story of working through the different exercises this semester shows how much my original working thesis changed.

I first decided on the idea for my original working thesis through writing my topic proposal essay. This essay got me thinking about the evolution of television censorship from shows like I Love Lucy to Desperate Housewives. I began to think of events in television history that would have caused a domino effect in censorship. So in my topic proposal essay, I said that there were three events in TV history that drastically changed the way that television was censored. The first of



these three events was Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show. His sexual dance moves sent shockwaves through conservative America. For the second event, I chose George Carlin's classic comedy skit "Filthy Words." The skit included "seven words you can never say on television" and was played over the radio by a small town DJ. The controversy surrounding the skit eventually snowballed into a lawsuit, and finally a Supreme Court case. For the third event I chose Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl halftime show performance. Her "wardrobe malfunction" on live television became grounds for the institution of a delay on all live broadcasts.

One of the reasons that I decided to choose three events was because I wanted to trace some longer trends in television, and also because I was worried about not having enough evidence to support my thesis in a research essay. I can see now though that I had too much going on in my original thesis. I was going to have far too much information and my paper would probably lose its focus. Also, when I look back at my topic proposal essay now, I see that I only cited one reference each for Presley and Carlin, and I wrote that I found, "hundreds of articles on several databases and on the World Wide Web" about Jackson. That should have been my first red flag that the bulk of the information available to me was going to be on Jackson.

Regardless, when I completed my topic proposal essay, my working thesis was, "Three main events in history have changed censorship: Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show, George Carlin's Supreme Court case, and Janet Jackson on the 2004 Super Bowl."

My evaluation of my own working thesis continued throughout my critique essay. For this essay, I chose to



critique an article called "The New Puritanism" by Eric Gillin and Greg Lindsay, published in Advertising Age and accessed electronically through the Wilson Select database. This article investigated the consequences of Jackson's Super Bowl stunt and, to my surprise, these consequences were not only felt in television. The wave of conservatism that Jackson created was felt strongly in the world of advertising and big business. The article poses the seemingly unanswerable question of how to make everyone content with mass media content.

Gillin and Lindsay lean towards the idea that the conflict that lies in censorship is a generational one. They write "74% of consumers ages 12 to 20 said CBS overreacted in its response". They also describe some of the possible solutions that have been proposed to solve the censorship conflict. Some of these suggestions include running parallel ad campaigns with designated ratings.

This article finally caused me to realize the seriousness of Jackson's actions. "The New Puritanism" pointed out several ways in which advertising companies and big businesses like Wal-Mart altered their campaigns and content after the incident. For example, Wal-Mart pulled Maxim magazine off of their shelves and Budweiser pulled some of their commercials off of the air. Gillin and Lindsay describe an impossible situation in both television and advertising, and warn, "sex or violence... may be off the mainstream for good" (6).

Gillin's and Lindsay's article first got me thinking about the fusion of academic culture and popular culture. Going into this project, I assumed that every academic article was going to take the side of the FCC. Much to my



surprise, almost all the academic articles I found carried warnings of the FCC's over-involvement in the media. This article also made me look once again at my working thesis. When I was searching for an article to critique, I could not find any on Carlin or Elvis. The sources that I had for the Carlin and Elvis consisted mostly of web sites or page long narratives. I found it very difficult to locate any article that I would be able to use in my critique essay. Another red flag. However, after my critique essay I felt more confident in stating that Jackson's halftime show changed media censorship.

When it came time for me to write my antithesis essay, I was really worried. Almost all of the articles I found warned about the dangers of the FCC's power. I was concerned that I would not be able to find any evidence that supported my antithetical arguments. I finally found my answer on a website created by United States Senator Sam Brownback. Senator Brownback served as one of the sponsors for the Broadcast Decency Act of 2004. He wants stronger regulations from the FCC and other parts of the government. On his web site, Brownback stated that Jackson's halftime show "is just the most memorable example of the growing volume of inappropriate material that is broadcast..." He argues that Jackson's halftime show did not serve as an important event in censorship history, only the most recognizable. Brownback goes on:

We live in a nation where we hold the First Amendment in high regard. In an effort to maintain the free exchange of information, thoughts, and opinions, we strive to avoid government involvement in communications content. At the same time, we are nation raising children. With the turning of a tuning



knob, or a click of the remote, Americans are presented with the content of the public airwaves and the culture it generates. Broadcasters can express any viewpoint and idea they want, but they have a legal and moral duty to ensure that viewers, especially minors, are not presented with explicit material.

In response to this, I found an article on the web site "Intellectual Conservative Politics and Philosophy" by Wendy McElroy titled "Censorship is Not a Solution for Trashy TV." She directly challenges Brownback and says that the consequences of the Broadcast Decency Act "may be far worse than a bit of trashy exhibitionism on TV." McElroy's article defended my idea that Jackson's halftime show changed censorship in that it propelled the Broadcast Decency Act into the public interest.

Critic Tom Shales, writing for Television Week, agrees. In an article I found via the Wilson Select database titled "The Real Indecency Is The Show In Washington," Shales said:

Clearly the saddest and most infuriating irony of the whole mess is that Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell is demagoguing this "issue" into a national frenzy, or at least a federal frenzy, about indecency in the media, thus distracting attention from his attempt to impose a radical relaxation of media ownership rules on the country.

When I wrote my antithesis paper I was still thinking of using Carlin's Supreme Court case in my thesis. I included a paragraph arguing that Carlin's "filthy words" are still filthy by today's standards. I still believe this to be true, and I think I made a solid argument defending my thesis. The problem was that I did not include any



citations to back up my argument. My main reason for holding onto Carlin in my thesis was to make sure that I had enough research in my essay. However, the antithesis paper reaffirmed for me that Jackson "wardrobe malfunction" incident was a good subject for my essay. The antithesis essay put my doubts to rest by showing me that there were people that disagreed with my thesis and also that I could argue my position.

It was because of the categorization essay that I was finally able to decide on my thesis. After I put all of my sources into credible and non-credible categories, I discovered that most of the non-credible sources were on Elvis or Carlin. I simply did not have credible sources on either of the two and made the final decision to cut them completely out of my working thesis. I also divided my citations into sources that were for the FCC and sources that were against the FCC. Again I saw the reoccurring theme that most of my sources were against the FCC and its involvement in mass media. In "The Darker Reaches of the Government," Anthony Mathews warns that if the FCC and the United States government continue to control our television media, "no constitutional guarantee of basic freedoms will exist"(243). It seemed that most of my research made a similar point about the importance of keeping our First Amendment rights in tact.

Even though the categorization exercise was by far the most difficult for me to complete, I learned the most about my working thesis by doing it. The essay made me think more seriously about my sources. In a way, it only makes sense that most of my articles were against the FCC's involvement in media because the articles are part of the media. Why would a journalist, author or any writer suggest that the



FCC should censor mass media when their articles, journals and books could be just as easily censored?

Our First Amendment rights are not limited to television and other technologies, a point that I neglected to consider at the beginning of the semester. Also it proved challenging to put my sources into credible and non-credible categories. I would not cite People as a credible source if I was writing about pharmaceuticals, but I felt that I had to consider the magazine an expert on my subject of Janet Jackson. In other words, it seems to me that credible and non-credible sources can differ depending on the subject matter.

I wish that I could have done the categorization and evaluation exercise earlier in the semester. After taking one look at my notes and prewriting for that exercise, I realized that I had more than enough information on Jackson to write an essay. If I had categorized my sources sooner I would have revised my working thesis much earlier in the semester. And beyond that, I think that this was the exercise where I learned the most about research writing. I plan on working through some of the categorizing exercises the next time I have to write a research essay, especially making a chart to help me sort through my evidence. Perhaps by doing so I will be able to see more clearly what sources will work in my essay and what points I can include in my working thesis.

Even though my working thesis has changed drastically throughout the duration of the semester, I feel that I am now finally happy with my thesis: "Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl wardrobe malfunction has changed the way that Americans view television." I have good evidence supporting my thesis, I can defend my thesis against an antithetical



argument and I know where my own opinion lies. I don't know if I will ever use my knowledge of Jackson's wardrobe malfunction in my everyday life, though if it does come up in conversation, I'll have my answer. But I do think that the skills I learned through revising my working thesis and writing these essays will prove useful in many future essays to come.

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The Web-Based Research Project

Most academics—students and teachers alike—have become comfortable with using the Internet for at least a part of their research. As I have said in many other places in *The Process of Research Writing*, you have to be cautious when using many web-based sources because they aren't necessarily as credible as other popular and academic sources. Nonetheless, the Web still represents a great place to find information on a wide variety of topics, and it is a great place for you to *publish* research on almost any topic.

The Advantages of the Web-Based Research Project

There are many advantages to creating Web sites that have nothing to do with writing research projects. Making Web pages is fun—the Internet is a great place to post pictures of your friends and pets, and it's a good way to share your writing with others through blogging or posting your poetry or short stories. But for the purposes of publishing academic research, I believe the Web has three main advantages over more traditional “paper” outlets.

- **The Web allows you to present your research with graphics, with multimedia, and/or as a “hypertext.”**

While paper-based research projects limit you to black-and-white typed text on a page (with perhaps a few graphic elements here and there), Web-based research projects will almost certainly include colors and graphics to enhance the effectiveness of the site. It's also possible to include some simple multimedia elements into your research project—sound clips, short video clips, or animation, for example.

The Web also makes it possible to present your research project not as a linear “beginning to end” essay but as a “hypertext,” a type of text that allows for—even encourages—different approaches and readings. I discuss this in a bit more detail later on in this chapter.

- **Your research project can become available to a broad, diverse, and international audience.**

Traditional paper-based research projects usually only reach a small audience—your classmates, your teacher, and perhaps other friends and colleagues. Web-based research projects are available to any of the tens of millions of people all over the world who spend at least some time surfing the Web.

Now, let's be realistic: your Web site is not going to have as many readers as popular sites like Yahoo! or the CNN web site. Just as is the case with traditional publishing, simply making your writing available is no guarantee that you will attract a large audience of readers.



However, the *potential* reach of your Web-based research project is enormous, certainly much larger than the potential audience of a more traditional research project. Further, if you register your site with various search engines and search directories (and most of them provide information on how to do this), your site will eventually show up on the searches that other researchers conduct.

- **The Web Facilitates Collaboration**

Chances are, you are already familiar with one of the Web's most powerful features, the "link:" the highlighted element of text that a Web reader clicks on in order to go to another Web page. The ability to link your Web page to just about any other Web page out there allows you to make a lot of very literal connections to other writers and publications, which is in itself a form of collaboration.

But in a more concrete sense, the Web facilitates collaboration with your colleagues since you can build links to each others' Web sites. This allows writers to work simultaneously on different parts of the same document, and to link to each other when it comes time to put the research project together. In my experiences as writer and a teacher, this approach is an excellent balance between the two extremes of collaboration I describe in Chapter Four ("How to Collaborate and Write With Others").

The Disadvantages of the Web-Based Research Project

While the advantages of creating Web sites for your research are significant, the disadvantages are significant as well. So before you commit yourself and your colleagues to Web-based research project, you need to take a moment to consider some of the challenges you'll face in making your Web site and your abilities to cope with these potential problems.

- **Computer hardware and software access**

To make a Web page, you obviously need to have easy access to a personal computer connected to the Internet, either one you own, one where you live, or one at your school that you can use on a fairly regular basis. You will also need to have at least some basic software to create and edit your Web site and to manipulate graphics. Last, and far from least, you need to have access to a server, which is a computer on a network that delivers (or *serves*) Web pages to users. I discuss all of these issues in more detail later in this chapter.

For some students and teachers, these access issues are very difficult to overcome. For example, at the university where I teach, students don't have "easy access" to a server where they can publish their Web sites. While this is a state of affairs that is changing, it means that it is quite challenging for my students to publish their Web sites, even though most of them have access to a personal computer.

- **Learning about HTML and other computer literacy skills**



Making web pages using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and HTML editing software is actually surprisingly easy. Making a *basic* Web site—made up of individual Web pages that are just text, links, and simple graphics—is not “computer programming” in the sense that it requires special computer skills or training.

However, making a Web site does require a degree of computer skill and literacy that many of my students and fellow English teachers have not quite achieved. In other words, while you don’t have to be a “computer geek” to make a simple Web site, you do need to be relatively “computer literate” to learn how to make a Web site.

- **Time, time, and time!**

Creating, uploading, trouble-shooting, and editing Web sites simply takes time, certainly more time than simply typing an essay with a word processor. You are already probably spending a lot of time researching and writing about your research project; given the time it takes to learn how to make Web pages and then to actually make them, it might be logistically impossible for you and your classmates to put together Web-based research projects in an academic term.

But it is also more time consuming because when you create a web site—even a simple one as a class project—you are moving from the role of “academic writer” to “Web *publisher*.” And as a Web publisher, you need to concern yourself with things like layout, colors, links, and graphics. So if you and your classmates decide to present your research on the Web, you should probably budget more time for completing the final version of your web site than you would if you were writing an essay or creating a research portfolio.

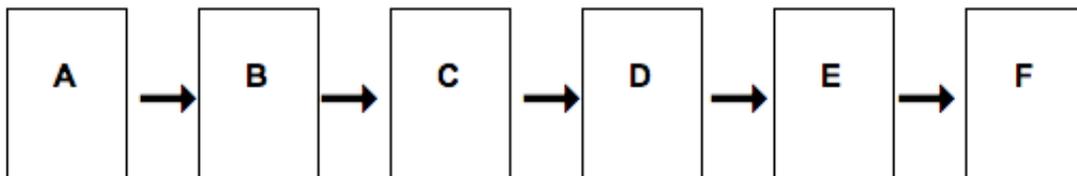


Web Publishing versus Hypertext

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of creating a research-based Web site in the first place, the next step is to decide if you want to merely *publish* your research essay on the Web, or if you want to develop a *hypertext* version of your research project.

By merely “publish,” I mean the process where you take your research essay as it exists on paper, convert it into an “HTML file” or as a “PDF file” (Portable Document Format) and then upload it to the Web. By hypertext, I mean the process where you create a series of HTML files that contain the text to your research project and that contain highlighted words, phrases, or images that allow potential readers to explore and read your research in nonsequential ways.

A Web published research essay is really no different than the sort of traditional research essay project I discussed in chapter ten, except that it is available on the World Wide Web. If we were to map this essay, it might look something like this:



With Web published research essay projects, you are expecting your readers to read in a particular order, from beginning to end, from “A” to “F.” In fact, each of these different parts of your research essay project could be part of one text file, available to your reader to scroll through or print and read later. And of course, if you decide to publish your research essay as a PDF, then readers will have to either print your essay or use software like Adobe Acrobat Reader to read your essay.

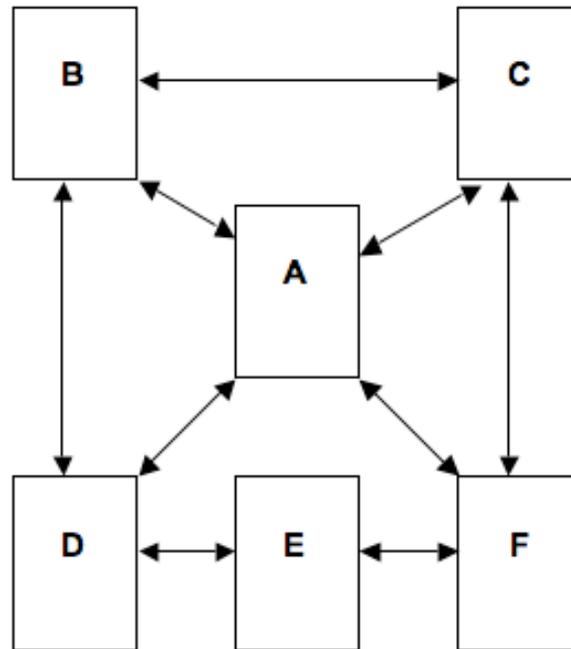
There are two advantages to web publishing your essays like this:

- **It is easy to do.** Since most word processing software allows users to convert files into HTML or PDFs, publishing a paper-based research project is simply a matter of saving in a different format and uploading to a server.
- **Web publishing preserves the order and “feel” of a paper-based research project.** This is especially true of PDFs.

The main disadvantage of Web publishing like this is it isn’t as dynamic or as flexible as a hypertextual research project. This depends on the audience of course, but often times, web readers are more likely to read and use your web site if it is presented as hypertext intended to be read on the screen.



A “hypertextual” research project might be mapped like this:



In this example, each of the boxes represents a different part of the Web site, and thus a different file—instead of scrolling from one part of the Web site to the next, readers have to follow links to other parts of the site. While most hypertext Web sites begin with some starting point (often a sort of “table of contents” page), they are written and designed in a way that allows for multiple ways of reading. Readers could as easily read from point “D” to point “F” as they can read from point “A” to point “B,” and, if the hypertext is effectively presented, both readings will be informative to the reader.

The main advantage of presenting a research project as a hypertext is basically the opposite of simply “Web publishing” a research essay: hypertexts are dynamic and more interactive than traditional essays presented on the Web, and readers they give readers more and different opportunities to interact with them.

Think of your own reading habits when it comes to the World Wide Web: chances are, you are more likely to read through a site that presents text in small chunks and that allows you to select links to the part of the site that interests you. Further, if you are a typical Web reader, you are less likely to read through a site if you have to scroll down the page or print out the site to read it.

Along these lines, the main disadvantages of research projects presented as hypertexts are the opposite of Web published research essays:

- **They aren’t as easy to make.** For one thing, it might take a considerable amount of work to divide up the parts of your research project into different



parts of a hypertext. For another, each separate part or “page” of your Web site (represented here by the different lettered boxes) is a separate HTML document that you need to create and maintain. While this isn’t difficult to do, it does take some time and effort, certainly more so than if you were to simply convert a word-processed file into a Web page.

- **Hypertextual research projects can’t preserve the order of presentation.** After all, one of the points of a hypertext is to give your reader options in how they want to read it. While you can create hypertexts that give readers the option of reading the project straight through, your readers might not choose to read that way, which can cause some confusion.

A Web Writing Recipe: What You Need to Get Started, and Where You Can Go To Get Help

If you want to publish your research writing on the web, you will need to learn a few basic computer skills, you’ll need some modest computer hardware and software, and you’ll need to have access to computer server space that can host your web sites. Here is a basic “Web Writing recipe” to get you started.

A little knowledge of HTML. Hypertext Markup Language is the basic coding system that makes the Web work. *Technically*, you don’t have to use HTML to make your web sites, but not knowing anything about HTML can be very confusing.

Fortunately, HTML is fairly easy to learn. There are many guides to HTML available for free on the Web (and the *The Process of Research Writing Catalyst* Web site links to some of them), and there are also many books available that provide basic instruction in working with HTML.

Some basic computer hardware and software. Most personal computers connected to the Internet can be used to make Web pages. However, not all personal computers have the basic software needed to make Web pages.

You can make a Web page with just about any text editing program, even something as simple as “Note Pad,” which comes on all Windows-based personal computers. However, you will probably want to use a software application specifically designed for making Web pages. There are a variety of free applications that can help you, and there are links to some of these programs at the *The Process of Research Writing Catalyst* Web site, though the best programs are commercial products. Currently, the two best known products for making Web sites are Microsoft’s FrontPage and Macromedia’s Dreamweaver. You may want to ask the Information Technology specialists at school about the availability of this software on your campus.

Finally, since you will probably want to include some graphics and photographic images with your Web site, you will also need software that handles graphics and photographs. Again, some of these products are free (though the best ones



are not), and you may want to ask the Information Technology specialists at school about the availability of this software.

Access to a web server. In order to make your Web site available to other readers, you need to upload your Web site (the HTML files and any of the graphics accompany your site) to a *Web server*. A server “serves” files to Web readers (usually known as “clients” or “users”) when they request a particular Web site by entering in a specific web address.

Increasingly, many colleges and universities are providing web server space to the academic community so that they can publish their work on the World Wide Web. Ask your local Information Technology specialist for information. There are also numerous other ways to make your Web site available on a server, both for a modest cost or for free.

The Assignment

Create a web site to present your research project. Keep in mind that you will need to decide early in the process if you want to present your research as a “web published” version of a linear essay or if you want to present your research in a “hypertextual” format. You should keep in mind an audience of your classmates and your teacher, but remember that your web site will be accessible by anyone on the Internet interested in your topic. Your web site should have as much content as a more conventional essay, and you will need to cite evidence as appropriate as well.

There are many possible variations to this assignment. For example, since web site projects are excellent opportunities for collaboration, this might be a good project to work on with your classmates.

The Poster Session Project

At many academic conferences in a variety of different disciplines, faculty and student participants often have the option to present their research to other conference participants in a “Poster Session.” It’s similar in some ways to a science fair of the sort you might remember from junior high school: participants literally make a poster or some other sort of multi-media presentation (photographs, charts, sound recordings, video) that represent the presenter’s research.

The poster session project is different from the other alternatives to the traditional research paper I’ve discussed in this chapter because it is a *supplement* rather than a *replacement* for other research writing projects. But poster sessions are important supplements to other writing projects because they provide a different way for researchers to interact with each other and their projects, and they can work well for students in composition courses, too.



The Assignment

Based on the work you have completed with your research project, create a presentation for poster session. Your presentation could be a poster, but it does not have to be limited to just a poster. You might include other sorts of models or representations, audio files, video, etc.-- use your imagination! During our poster session, you will be expected to answer questions from others about your presentation.

Poster sessions can be small, limited to a single class, or, as the example of the Eastern Michigan University "Celebration of Student Writing" demonstrates, they can be very large. You might also supplement their poster with a short essay that explains what choices you made in putting together your presentation and why.

Sidebar

A Program-wide Poster Session: The Eastern Michigan University "Celebration of Student Writing"



Students visit and browse classmate's projects at the Celebration of Student Writing.

Eastern Michigan University's First Year Composition program has an innovative program-wide Poster Session presentation called the "Celebration of Student Writing." Every semester, hundreds of students enrolled in first year composition courses and their instructors gather for the afternoon-long celebration. They share posters and presentations of their own and they browse and visit the posters and presentations of their classmates.

What kinds of posters and presentations do students put together? "Sometimes, whole classes work on a single project, or a single-themed project," said Linda Adler-Kassner, the director of the first year composition program at EMU. "Others do individual projects related to a single theme. For example, one student made life-sized cardboard people representing the communities they studied, then made speech balloons coming from them to give some details about their findings and wrote



Cardboard cut-outs represent the members of a student's research community.



explanations about the process.”

Other projects have included the use of video, interactive games where audiences try to answer questions about a research project, models that represent some aspect of the research project, and almost every imaginable sort of poster. “We’ve even had students who dress up in costume to represent their research,” Adler-Kassner said.

The celebration is the culmination of the first year writing experience where student research focuses on issues of language and community. Students write a variety of research writing projects throughout the semester and then share their work during the celebration. And students take their posters and presentations for the celebration quite seriously. “It’s one thing to come up with a catchy project-- and that takes some thinking, too-- and another to figure out how to let visitors know how much work, and what kind of work, has gone into coming to that point.”

The main audience for the celebration is other students and instructors involved in the first year composition program at EMU. But other members of the EMU community attend the celebration as well-- other students, faculty, and university administrators. And the large and diverse audience bring an added significance to the students’ research. “Students feel like people actually do care about what they write, and that the writing of others is actually interesting to them,” Adler-Kassner said. “They feel more a part of the institution because this event is attended by so many folks. They feel like they have something to say, and that people are interested.”

For more information on the Eastern Michigan University First Year Composition program’s “Celebration of Student Writing,” visit the program’s web site at <http://www.emich.edu/english/fycomp>

