

# Argumentative Writing

Thursday, February 21, 2013

Upper Arlington High School  
Senior Language Arts Teachers

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## Upper Arlington High School

# Capstone Essay

2012-13

### What is the Essay?

The essay is an in-depth study of a focused topic connected to your Senior Capstone Project. It is intended to promote high-level research and writing skills, intellectual discovery and creativity. It provides students with an opportunity to engage in personal research in a topic of their own choice, under the guidance of their teacher and mentor. The paper will be a position/persuasive paper, in which students will take a stand on a position and use properly researched evidence for support. This leads to a major piece of formally presented, structured writing, in which ideas and findings are communicated in a reasoned and coherent manner, appropriate to the subject chosen.

### The Essay Basics

- Create a research question; explore possible answers, which will lead to your thesis statement.
- Keep your topic and research question manageable. A focused research question is always better.
- The essay is a maximum of 4,000 words (excluding Works Cited and abstract).
- You should evaluate sources to make sure you are using relevant, credible sources to garner support for your position.
- Keep track of all sources used as you will be asked to explain why some sources are credible

## Researching your Essay

### What is the purpose of your research?

- Your research should seek to provide with you with a depth and range of knowledge so that you:
  - understand the background and academic context of your topic
  - assemble an appropriate variety of viewpoints and evidence
  - know your topic back to front
  - keep a paper and e-trail, including page numbers and urls
  - develop your interest in your topic and question

### How should you conduct research?

- Research should involve a range of sources, including books, journals, websites, interviews, etc.
- There are several databases and search engines designed specifically for research papers that you should consult.
- Make sure that you keep a detailed record of the sources you use.

### How should the assessment criteria influence your research?

- Of the 11 assessment criteria, there are a number which you should keep in mind as you research:
- **Investigation** (criterion C) – you have gathered a range of appropriate sources or data and carefully selected what appears in the essay; your investigation should be well planned.
- **Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied** (criterion D) – you demonstrate sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the topic studied; where appropriate, you have precisely located the investigation in its academic context.
- **Reasoned argument** (criterion E) – you present ideas clearly and in a logical and coherent manner; you develop a reasoned and convincing argument in relation to the research question. Consider counterclaims and contradictory evidence.
- **Holistic judgment** (criterion K) – your essay shows intellectual initiative, depth of understanding and insight.

# Writing the Essay

## What is the purpose of the essay?

- To present a structured, well-reasoned, well-developed, well-supported argument to convince a real-world audience.
- To allow others to follow your process and check the primary and secondary data.
- To produce something of which you can be proud.
- To further develop and reflect on your skills as an academic.

## How should the assessment criteria influence how you write your essay?

- You will be assessed on analysis and evaluation, not for description or narrative.
- You must have a front cover with the research question as a title, a table of contents, an introduction, main body, conclusion, abstract and a Works Cited.
- You must have accurate citations written in a consistent style (APA, MLA, etc.).
- You must follow the appropriate format and use formal, academic language.

## Finishing the Writing

- Some assessment criteria are focused on very specific sections of your essay, such as the Abstract, Introduction and Research Question.
- Properly formatted Works Cited is imported.

## The Assessment Criteria

- A. Research Question-** The clearly articulated research question focuses on a complex issue of contemporary significance that the student has investigated in a thorough and sophisticated manner.
- B. Introduction-** The introduction explains the significance and context of the research question and why it is worthy of investigation while also outlining the organization of the subsequent argument.
- C. Investigation-** The warrants for using selected materials, sources, data, and evidence are clear. While journalistic and media sources may be appropriate for some studies, the essay should adhere to the expectations (the logics of inquiry) of the academic discipline where the argument is situated. The best essays will reflect a broad and recursive search for resources.
- D. Knowledge & Understanding of Topic-** The student's essay reflects a thorough understanding of the background and context of the subject matter. Strong essays will employ the terminology and research methodology of the selected academic discipline.
- E. Reasoned Argument-** The argument is presented in the form of a logical and coherent exploration of the research question. All claims are supported by authoritative sources and counterclaims and contradictory evidence is considered. Strong essays openly state the limitations of the argument and suggest paths for future research.
- F. Application of Analytical and Evaluative Skills Appropriate to the Subject-** All sources have been vetted for credibility and authority and have been properly cited. The materials used in the position paper demonstrate the author's sensitivity to the relative power of sources.
- G. Use of Language Appropriate to the Subject-** The author employs terminology appropriate for the subject and explains any obscure or contested terms. The voice is academic but accessible.
- H. Conclusion-** The conclusion reflects on the argument and characterizes how understanding has been advanced by the methodology and content of the paper. The conclusion may suggest new insights and new questions for research.
- I. Formal Presentation-** The essay conforms to all format and content expectations.
- J. Abstract-** The formal abstract states the research question, characterizes the methods of investigation, and provides a summary of the conclusion in less than 300 words.
- K. Holistic Judgement-** Qualities such as personal engagement, initiative, depth of understanding, inventiveness, and timeliness are considered here.

# Capstone/Extended Essay Scoring Guide

Student \_\_\_\_\_

**A: Research Question-** The clearly articulated research question focuses on a complex issue of contemporary significance that the student has investigated in a thorough and sophisticated manner.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**B: Introduction-**The introduction explains the significance and context of the research question and why it is worthy of investigation while also outlining the organization of the subsequent argument.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**C: Investigation-** The warrants for using the selected materials, sources, data, and evidence are clear. While journalistic and media sources may be appropriate for some studies, the essay should adhere to the expectations (the logics of inquiry) of the academic discipline where the argument is situated. The best essays will reflect a broad and recursive search for resources.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**D: Knowledge & Understanding of Topic-** The student's essay reflects a thorough understanding of the background and context of the subject matter. Strong essays will employ the terminology and research methodology of the selected academic discipline.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**E: Reasoned Argument-**The argument is presented in the form of a logical and coherent exploration of the research question. All claims are supported by authoritative sources and counterclaims and contradictory evidence is considered. Strong essays openly state the limitations of the argument and suggest paths for future research.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**F: Application of Analytical and Evaluative Skills Appropriate to the Subject-**All sources have been vetted for credibility and authority and have been properly cited. The materials used in the position paper demonstrate the author's sensitivity to the relative power of sources.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**G: Use of Language Appropriate to the Subject-**The author employs terminology appropriate for the subject and explains any obscure or contested terms. The voice is academic but accessible.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**H: Conclusion-** The conclusion reflects on the argument and characterizes how understanding has been advanced by the methodology and content of the paper. The conclusion may suggest new insights and new questions for research.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**I: Formal Presentation-**The essay conforms to all format and content expectations.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**J: Abstract-** The formal abstract states the research question, characterizes the methods of investigation, and provides a summary of the conclusion in less than 300 words.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

**K: Holistic Judgment-**Qualities such as personal engagement, initiative, depth of understanding, inventiveness, and timeliness are considered here.

8/9	Exceeding
6/7	Meeting
4/5	Emerging
2/3	Limited
0	Not Yet

Richard L. Larson

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## The "Research Paper" in the Writing Course: A Non-Form of Writing

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Let me begin by assuring you that I do not oppose the assumption that student writers in academic and professional settings, whether they be freshmen or sophomores or students in secondary school or intend to be journalists or lawyers or scholars or whatever, should engage in research. I think they should engage in research, and that appropriately informed people should help them learn to engage in research in whatever field these writers happen to be studying. Nor do I deny the axiom that writing should incorporate the citation of the writer's sources of information when those sources are not common knowledge. I think that writers must incorporate into their writing the citation of their sources—and they must also incorporate the thoughtful, perceptive evaluation of those sources and of the contribution that those sources might have made to the writer's thinking. Nor do I oppose the assumption that a writer should make the use of appropriate sources a regular activity in the process of composing. I share the assumption that writers should identify, explore, evaluate, and draw upon appropriate sources as an integral step in what today we think of as the composing process.

In fact, let me begin with some positive values. On my campus, the Department of English has just decided to request a change in the description of its second-semester freshman course. The old description read as follows:

This course emphasizes the writing of formal analytic essays and the basic methods of research common to various academic disciplines. Students will write frequently in and out of class. By the close of the semester, students will demonstrate mastery of the formal expository essay and the research paper. Individual conferences.

The department is asking our curriculum committee to have the description read:

This course emphasizes the writing of analytical essays and the methods of inquiry common to various academic disciplines. Students will write frequently in and out of class. By the close of the semester, students will demonstrate their ability to write essays incorporating references to suitable sources of information and to use appropriate methods of documentation. Individual conferences.

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Richard L. Larsen is a faculty member and administrator at Herbert Lehman College of the City University of New York. He is, among his many services to NCTE and the profession, the editor of *College Composition and Communication*. This essay was originally delivered as a paper during the MLA meetings in December 1981, and it will appear in a collection of essays, *Teaching the Research Paper*, edited by James Ford and to be published by MLA.

College English, Volume 44, Number 8, December 1982

I applauded the department for requesting that change, and I wrote to the college curriculum committee to say so.

While thinking about this paper—to take another positive example—I received from the University of Michigan Press a copy of the proofs of a forthcoming book titled *Researching American Culture: A Guide for Student Anthropologists*, sent to me because members of the English Composition Board of the University of Michigan had decided that the book might be of use as a supplementary text at Michigan in writing courses that emphasize writing in the academic disciplines. Along with essays by professional anthropologists presenting or discussing research in anthropology, the book includes several essays by students. In these essays the students, who had been instructed and guided by faculty in anthropology, report the results of research they have performed on aspects of American culture, from peer groups in high school to connections between consumption of alcohol and tipping in a restaurant, to mortuary customs, to sports in America. If anyone was in doubt about the point, the collection demonstrates that undergraduate students can conduct and report sensible, orderly, clear, and informative research in the discipline of anthropology. I am here to endorse, indeed to applaud, such work, not to question the wisdom of such collections as that from Michigan or to voice reservations about the capacity of undergraduates for research.

Why, then, an essay whose title makes clear a deep skepticism about “research papers”? First, because I believe that the generic “research paper” as a concept, and as a form of writing taught in a department of English, is not defensible. Second, because I believe that by saying that we teach the “research paper”—that is, by acting as if there is a generic concept defensibly entitled the “research paper”—we mislead students about the activities of both research and writing. I take up these propositions in order.

We would all agree to begin with, I think, that “research” is an activity in which one engages. Probably almost everyone reading this paper has engaged, at one time or another, in research. Most graduate seminars require research; most dissertations rely upon research, though of course many dissertations in English may also include analytical interpretation of texts written by one or more authors. Research can take many forms: systematically observing events, finding out what happens when one performs certain procedures in the laboratory, conducting interviews, tape-recording speakers’ comments, asking human beings to utter aloud their thoughts while composing in writing or in another medium and noting what emerges, photographing phenomena (such as the light received in a telescope from planets and stars), watching the activities of people in groups, reading a person’s letters and notes: all these are research. So, of course, is looking up information in a library or in newspaper files, or reading documents to which one has gained access under the Freedom of Information Act—though reading filed and catalogued documents is in many fields not the most important (it may be the least important) activity in which a “researcher” engages. We could probably define “research” generally as the seeking out of information new to the seeker, for a purpose, and we would probably agree that the researcher usually has to interpret, evaluate, and organize that information before

it acquires value. And we would probably agree that the researcher has to present the fruits of his or her research, appropriately ordered and interpreted, in symbols that are intelligible to others, before that research can be evaluated and can have an effect. Most often, outside of mathematics and the sciences (and outside of those branches of philosophy that work with nonverbal symbolic notation), maybe also outside of music, that research is presented to others, orally or in writing, in a verbal language.

But research still is an activity; it furnishes the substance of much discourse and can furnish substance to almost any discourse except, possibly, one's personal reflections on one's own experience. But it is itself the subject—the substance—of no distinctively identifiable kind of writing. Research can inform virtually any writing or speaking if the author wishes it to do so; there is nothing of substance or content that differentiates one paper that draws on data from outside the author's own self from another such paper—nothing that can enable one to say that this paper is a "research paper" and that paper is not. (Indeed even an ordered, interpretive reporting of altogether personal experiences and responses can, if presented purposively, be a reporting of research.) I would assert therefore that the so-called "research paper," as a generic, cross-disciplinary term, has no conceptual or substantive identity. If almost any paper is potentially a paper incorporating the fruits of research, the term "research paper" has virtually no value as an identification of a kind of substance in a paper. Conceptually, the generic term "research paper" is for practical purposes meaningless. We can not usefully distinguish between "research papers" and non-research papers; we can distinguish only between papers that should have incorporated the fruits of research but did not, and those that did incorporate such results, or between those that reflect poor or inadequate research and those that reflect good or sufficient research. I would argue that most undergraduate papers reflect poor or inadequate research, and that our responsibility as instructors should be to assure that each student reflect in each paper the appropriate research, wisely conducted, for his or her subject.

I have already suggested that "research" can take a wide variety of forms, down to and including the ordered presentation of one's personal reflections and the interpretations of one's most direct experiences unmediated by interaction with others or by reference to identifiably external sources. (The form of research on composing known as "protocol analysis," or even the keeping of what some teachers of writing designate as a "process journal," if conducted by the giver of the protocol or by the writer while writing, might be such research.) If research can refer to almost any process by which data outside the immediate and purely personal experiences of the writer are gathered, then I suggest that just as the so-called "research paper" has no conceptual or substantive identity, neither does it have a procedural identity; the term does not necessarily designate any particular kind of data nor any preferred procedure for gathering data. I would argue that the so-called "research paper," as ordinarily taught by the kinds of texts I have reviewed, implicitly equates "research" with looking up books in the library and taking down information from those books. Even if there is going on in some departments of English instruction that gets beyond



those narrow boundaries, the customary practices that I have observed for guiding the "research paper" assume a procedural identity for that paper that is, I think, nonexistent.

As the activity of research can take a wide variety of forms, so the presentation and use of research within discourse can take a wide variety of forms. Indeed I cannot imagine any identifiable design that any scholar in rhetoric has identified as a recurrent plan for arranging discourse which cannot incorporate the fruits of research, broadly construed. I am not aware of any kind or form of discourse, or any aim, identified by any student of rhetoric or any theorist of language or any investigator of discourse theory, that is distinguished primarily—or to any extent—by the presence of the fruits of "research" in its typical examples. One currently popular theoretical classification of discourse, that by James Kinneavy (*A Theory of Discourse* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971]), identifies some "aims" of discourse that might seem to furnish a home for papers based on research: "referential" and "exploratory" discourse. But, as I understand these aims, a piece of discourse does not require the presence of results of ordered "research" in order to fit into either of these classes, even though discourse incorporating the results of ordered research might fit there—as indeed it might under almost any other of Kinneavy's categories, including the category of "expressive" discourse. (All discourse is to a degree "expressive" anyway.) The other currently dominant categorization of examples of discourse—dominant even over Kinneavy's extensively discussed theory—is really a categorization based upon plans that organize discourse: narration (of completed events, of ongoing processes, of possible scenarios), causal analysis, comparison, analogy, and so on. None of these plans is differentiated from other plans by the presence within it of fruits from research; research can be presented, so far as I can see, according to any of these plans. And if one consults Frank J. D'Angelo's *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1975) one will not find, if my memory serves me reliably, any category of rhetorical plan or any fundamental human cognitive process—D'Angelo connects all rhetorical plans with human cognitive processes—that is defined by the presence of the fruits of research. If there is a particular rhetorical form that is defined by the presence of results from research, then, I have not seen an effort to define that form and to argue that the results of research are what identify it as a form. I conclude that the "research paper," as now taught, has no formal identity, as it has no substantive identity and no procedural identity.

For me, then, very little is gained by speaking about and teaching, as a generic concept, the so-called "research paper." If anything at all is gained, it is only the reminder that responsible writing normally depends on well-planned investigation of data. But much is lost by teaching the research paper in writing courses as a separately designated activity. For by teaching the generic "research paper" as a separate activity, instructors in writing signal to their students that there is a kind of writing that incorporates the results of research, and there are (by implication) many kinds of writing that do not and need not do so. "Research," students are allowed to infer, is a specialized activity that one en-

gages in during a special course, or late in a regular semester or year, but that one does not ordinarily need to be concerned about and can indeed, for the most part, forget about. Designating the "research paper" as a separate project therefore seems to me to work against the purposes for which we allegedly teach the research paper: to help students familiarize themselves with ways of gathering, interpreting, drawing upon, and acknowledging data from outside themselves in their writing. By talking of the "research paper," that is, we undermine some of the very goals of our teaching.

We also meet two other, related difficulties. First, when we tend to present the "research paper" as in effect a paper based upon the use of the library, we misrepresent "research." Granted that a good deal of research in the field of literature is conducted in the library among books, much research that is still entitled to be called humanistic takes place outside the library. It can take place, as I mentioned earlier, wherever "protocol" research or writers' analyses of their composing processes take place; it can take place in the living room or study of an author who is being interviewed about his or her habits of working. It can take place in the home of an old farmer or rancher or weaver or potter who is telling a student about the legends or songs of his or her people, or about the historical process by which the speaker came from roots at home or abroad. Much research relies upon books, but books do not constitute the corpus of research data except possibly in one or two fields of study. If we teach the so-called "research paper" in such a way as to imply that all or almost all research is done in books and in libraries, we show our provincialism and degrade the research of many disciplines.

Second, though we pretend to prepare students to engage in the research appropriate to their chosen disciplines, we do not and cannot do so. Faculty in other fields may wish that we would relieve them of the responsibility of teaching their students to write about the research students do in those other fields, but I don't think that as teachers of English we can relieve them of that responsibility. Looking at the work of the students who contributed to the University of Michigan Press volume on *Researching American Culture*, I can't conceive myself giving useful direction to those students. I can't conceive myself showing them how to do the research they did, how to avoid pitfalls, assure representativeness of data, draw permissible inferences, and reach defensible conclusions. And, frankly, I can't conceive many teachers of English showing these students what they needed to know either. I can't conceive myself, or very many colleagues (other than trained teachers of technical writing) guiding a student toward a report of a scientific laboratory experiment that a teacher of science would find exemplary. I can't conceive myself or many colleagues guiding a student toward a well-designed experiment in psychology, with appropriate safeguards and controls and wise interpretation of quantitative and nonquantitative information. In each of these fields (indeed probably in each academic field) the term "research paper" may have some meaning—quite probably a meaning different from its meaning in other fields. Students in different fields do write papers reporting research. We in English have no business claiming to teach "research" when research in different academic disciplines works from distinc-

tive assumptions and follows distinctive patterns of inquiry. Such distinctions in fact are what differentiate the disciplines. Most of us are trained in one discipline only and should be modest enough to admit it.

But let me repeat what I said when I started: that I don't come before you to urge that students of writing need not engage in "research." I think that they should engage in research. I think they should understand that in order to function as educated, informed men and women they have to engage in research, from the beginning of and throughout their work as writers. I think that they should know what research can embrace, and I think they should be encouraged to view research as broadly, and conduct it as imaginatively, as they can. I think they should be held accountable for their opinions and should be required to say, from evidence, why they believe what they assert. I think that they should be led to recognize that data from "research" will affect their entire lives, and that they should know how to evaluate such data as well as to gather them. And I think they should know their responsibilities for telling their listeners and readers where their data came from.

What I argue is that the profession of the teaching of English should abandon the concept of the generic "research paper"—that form of what a colleague of mine has called "messenger service" in which a student is told that for this one assignment, this one project, he or she has to go somewhere (usually the library), get out some materials, make some notes, and present them to the customer neatly wrapped in footnotes and bibliography tied together according to someone's notion of a style sheet. I argue that the generic "research paper," so far as I am familiar with it, is a concept without an identity, and that to teach it is not only to misrepresent research but also quite often to pander to the wishes of faculty in other disciplines that we spare them a responsibility that they must accept. Teaching the generic "research paper" often represents a misguided notion of "service" to other departments. The best service we can render to those departments and to the students themselves, I would argue, is to insist that students recognize their continuing responsibility for looking attentively at their experiences; for seeking out, wherever it can be found, the information they need for the development of their ideas; and for putting such data at the service of every piece they write. That is one kind of service we can do to advance students' humanistic and liberal education.

# The Washington Post

## Long papers in high school? Many college freshmen say they never had to do one.

By Jay Mathews  
Thursday, July 15, 2010; PG18

Kate Simpson is a full-time English professor at the Middletown, Va., campus of Lord Fairfax Community College. She saw my column about Prince George's County history teacher Doris Burton lamenting the decline of research skills in high school, as changing state and local course requirements and grading difficulties made required long essays a thing of the past.

So Simpson gave her freshman English students a writing assignment.

Simpson noted my complaint that few American high-schoolers, except those in International Baccalaureate programs, were ever asked to do a research project as long as 4,000 words. Was I right or wrong? Did her students feel prepared for college writing? The timing was good because her classes had just finished a three-week research writing project in which they had to cite sources, do outlines, write and revise drafts.

She said she discovered that 40 percent of her 115 students thought that their high schools had not prepared them for college-level writing. Only 23 percent thought they had those writing skills. Other responses were mixed.

Twenty-nine percent "felt that students should be taught to write lengthy papers in high school," Simpson reported. Seven percent "felt that long papers were not necessary but that emphasizing writing across the disciplines would be enough for students to learn how to focus on a topic and follow through with concepts," she said.

Here is what some of her freshmen said:

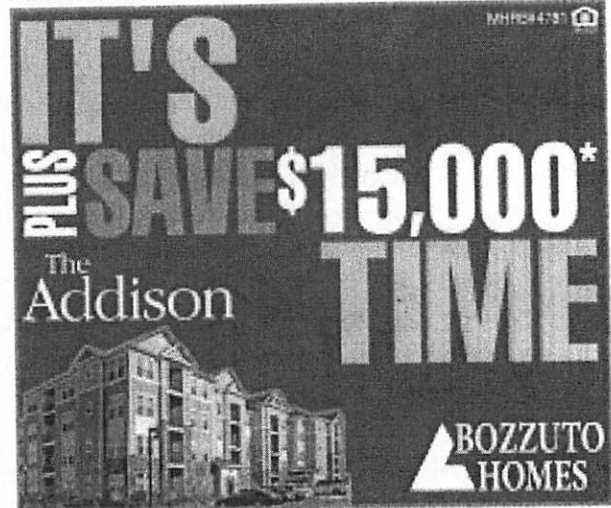
"Not once in my four years of high school was I required to turn in a paper of over 1,000 words."

"My high school instructors didn't have time to grade or teach . . . longer, in-depth papers. It was hard transitioning from high school with no writing experience to college."

"I was not required to write long papers ever. The teachers claimed that it would be too much to grade."

"My [high school] teachers assigned small [papers]; assignments that have not proved beneficial in the

Advertisement



Advertisement for Bozzuto Homes. The ad features a photograph of a modern, multi-story house with a gabled roof and large windows. The text is arranged as follows: "IT'S" in large, bold, white letters at the top left; "PLUS" in smaller, bold, white letters below it; "SAVE \$15,000\*" in large, bold, white letters to the right of "PLUS"; "The Addison" in a smaller, white, serif font below "SAVE"; "TIME" in large, bold, white letters to the right of "The Addison"; and the Bozzuto Homes logo (a stylized 'B' shape) and the text "BOZZUTO HOMES" in white at the bottom right. A small "MH1244751" and a house icon are in the top right corner.

long run."

One student who was home-schooled in high school praised the Seton Home Study School program, which required a lot of writing. But another said, "I hated writing [and] convinced my mom to stop making me write."

Some were lucky. "I had excellent English teachers who assigned papers almost weekly and had us writing every day," one student said. Another said that more high school writing was necessary but that my call for more 4,000-word (about 16 pages) papers was too much. "I was never assigned a paper needing more than 2,000 words, yet I am confident that my research skills still stand strong," the student said.

In what many teachers of my acquaintance would consider an understatement, Simpson said that "students do not always embrace the learning opportunities that fill the school day." In other words, teachers have to be persistent and tough.

"Plenty of books detailing various methods of teaching writing attempt to maximize student success and minimize educators' time and level of disillusionment," she wrote. "The truth is that learning to write takes a great deal of practice, and giving students feedback takes time and effort."

That responsibility falls more heavily on college professors such as Simpson than it should. I sense some high schools are getting the message. The ability to research questions and explain the results clearly is needed not just in college but in just about every trade or profession, and in life. Our teenagers will complain when we make them do it, but someday some of them might tell us, as they did Simpson, they were glad they did.

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## The term paper is disappearing

Some schools see rite of passage as quaint or unworkable amid growing class sizes

January 27, 2012 | By Tara Malone, Chicago Tribune reporter

The high school research paper, that academic rite of passage riddled with footnotes and anchored by a bibliography, has faded from many classrooms, a consequence of larger class sizes that leave teachers with more students and less time.

Several Chicago-area high schools have dialed back the paper's length requirements and instead emphasize the research process and weighing of sources, a critical skill in the digital era, teachers say.

This year, though, educators in the Skokie school sought to make standard the criteria by which all papers are judged. Sanlida Cheng, the school's director of English and reading, said teachers will consider a student's writing — from the language they use to how they construct an argument — and research, including the quality of their sources, citations and evidence.

Senior Michael Dawson, 18, of Lincolnwood, studied whether Roberto Clemente, his favorite baseball player, could be considered a tragic hero.

Dawson spent about a month reading biographies and other accounts of Clemente's life, flagging relevant sections with a system of color-coded sticky notes. He drafted the eight-page paper during winter break and emailed a final version, complete with a precisely punctuated bibliography, to his teacher. It was the first paper he'd written with works cited as they would be in college.

"Once you get to senior year," he said, "then it's all about the research paper."

In 2002, Fitzhugh persuaded the Albert Shanker Institute to fund a survey to find out how many public high school teachers assign history research papers. With state standardized exams increasingly affecting how students, teachers and schools are measured, he wondered if the traditional term paper might be lost.

About 95 percent of the 400 high school history teachers surveyed said they thought it was important for students to write a research paper, saying it improved students' research, writing and thinking skills, the study found. But six of every 10 said they never assign a paper longer than 12 pages.

Time played a leading role in the disconnect. About 27 percent of teachers cited the time required to read and correct papers as cause for why they did not hand out more term papers. A third said they spend 30 to 60 minutes grading every assignment, according to the results.

Fenwick High School assigns teachers a lighter load of classes in a nod to the intensive writing that students must do and that teachers must grade. English teachers at the Oak Park school shoulder four courses rather than the standard five, said Richard Borsch, associate principal.

"I want spaghetti sauce all over the paper. I want corrections so they learn," Borsch said.

For his part, Fitzhugh of The Concord Review offers a basic formula to promote scholarly writing in high schools. He calls it the page per year plan, under which a student would write a page for every year he or she is in school that draws on an equal number of sources and culminates in a 12-page paper by senior year, 12th grade.

And, he quipped, students must focus on a topic other than themselves.

"Let's give teachers exemplary work to show other kids, and they'll step up their game," he said. "We do that in athletics all the time."