

Frequently Asked Questions about the 460 Place Paper

Kelly Roark, Fall 2005

1. Do we have to do research?

Answer: Yes. BUT, remember that your place is your most important source. You should be “reading” the landscape. The foundation of this assignment is to write your own speculative environmental history. Your job is to explain how a place came to be. You should use *some* research, preferably including primary sources. Solely focusing on library research, however, will miss an essential part of the assignment. Look at the papers on-line to see how other folks balanced research and their own interpretations.

What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source?

Primary Sources

Primary sources are informational sources from the time of the event. Examples of primary sources: autobiographies, diaries, letters, objects from the time, oral histories, photographs, historic maps.

Primary sources are *from* the past.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are informational sources that analyze the event. These sources often use several primary sources and compile the information. Secondary sources are *about* the past.

2. I have never used citations. Do we have to use them?

Answer: Yes. Please use a standard, professional citation format. I would prefer that you use the Chicago Manual of Style format with footnotes or endnotes, but any professional citation format will work (MLA or APA, for example). Use quotation marks and citations for all sources, including lectures, books, pictures, maps, interviews, newspapers, etc. If you still aren't sure what to do, go to the writing center and pick up one of their guides to using citations. Or, you can get citation information on-line:

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Documentation.html>

click “Chicago/Turabian”

3. I have selected a place, but what should I write about?

Answer: Whatever you want. Creativity and originality will be rewarded. Be careful not to try to cover *everything* that is special or interesting about your place. Look at the papers on-line for inspiration. Also, this assignment is about showcasing your writing style and your ability to tell an interesting and persuasive story. Think about what questions you want your place paper to answer. Think about what themes of the course you will engage in your paper. Think about how you can structure your paper around cool sources you found. Also, read and re-read the very lengthy description of the paper assignment in your syllabus. It is full of suggestions and ideas for how to go about writing your place papers, how to structure an argument, and how to get an “A” on the paper.

4. Your silly page limit is cramping my style. Can I go over it to demonstrate my prowess as a writer and my mastery of the environmental history of my place?

Answer: No. The page limit, while not a strict absolute, is designed to force you to be clear and concise. It is also designed to prevent you from covering too much in your paper. Focusing on a few things – rather than many unconnected things – will make your paper better. Exceptions: if you are including pictures, maps, or other such sources in your paper that push your paper over the page limit, we will make an exception.

5. I'm more of an "ideas" person. Are you going to grade my writing?

Answer: Yes. Unlike the blue book exam format, you actually have time to spell check, construct grammatically correct sentences, and give significant thought to the structure of your paper. Presenting your ideas in a clearly organized manner is part of the assignment.

Tips:

Avoid passive voice. Examples: Mistakes were made. The railroad was built.

Edit your paper carefully: to avoid misused words like there, their, and they're.

Use the past tense when talking about things that happened in the past.

6. What is the required format of the paper?

Answer: Your paper must be typed. It must be DOUBLE SPACED. Please use an easily readable font – no smaller than 12 pt size. Please feel free to include pictures, copies of maps, or any other materials. I cannot accept electronic versions of your paper.

7. Make sure you have a solid thesis statement and build your argument throughout the paper. If you want more information on this topic, try one of the following web pages:

<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/thesis.html>

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Process.html>