

# ANTH 498 C / SOCI 498 D CYBERSPACE ETHNOGRAPHY RESEARCH PAPER GUIDELINES

The research paper is due on **MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2009**, by email, sent to [info@openanthropology.org](mailto:info@openanthropology.org)

*Only the following file formats can be accepted: PDF, .doc, .odt, .rtf.*

*Do not send in .docx format, please.*

The research paper is worth 45% of the total course grade, and is marked out of 45 points.

Please read details below, and please read them carefully and more than once during the course of the semester.

## Format guidelines for the research paper:

- **Maximum** of twenty (20) pages for the main body of your text (i.e., the cover page, if any, and the References listed at the end of the essay do not count towards the page limit)
- Double-spaced
- Times New Roman or Century font, 12 pt.
- 1-inch margins on all sides of every page
- These are not optional requirements. There will be a deduction of 2 of the maximum of 45 points for each and every one of the items above that is neglected, as well as for incorrect referencing (see below).

## References:

- please do *not* use footnotes or endnotes, at any point during the essay, for any purpose
- when citing someone's work, use the **parenthetical reference with reference list** guidelines as laid out in the document at: <http://www.library.mcgill.ca/human/SUBGUIDE/pdf/turab.pdf>
- simply copy the format you see used in that document, depending on the type of source you are using (i.e., book, journal article, website, etc.)
- in that document, **PR** refers to **parenthetical reference**, that is, the way you *refer to a source within the main body of your essay*—for example, (Smith 1992: 36) is a parenthetical reference...but it cannot tell us everything we need to do about the publication, hence the next point...
- in that document linked to above, **RL** means **reference list**, that is, the way you *list* each item you consulted for your essay, at the end of your essay. Usually you begin a new page, titled simply References or Works Cited. You see

this all the time in the readings we do for our course. (Smith 1992) now becomes something different, something like: Smith, Peter. 1992. *Causes and Consequences of Failure*. New York: Macmillan. Remember that items in a reference list have to appear in alphabetical order, ordered by author surname.

### Late submissions:

- No late papers will be accepted. In the absence of documentation proving very serious circumstances that prevented you from submitting the paper on time, the paper will automatically receive a grade of zero.

### Some basic reminders about research papers:

Ask yourself:

- Do I have an argument to make? What are my main points? Is the argument logical and coherent?
- Which concepts will I need to use? Do I define my terms?
- When describing, what question am I answering? Shouldn't I state the question first?

### Commonly asked questions:

- Q. *How many sources should I use?*--A. Initiative will be rewarded. For a research paper based on participant observation, the minimum number of published sources to be used in helping you to develop an analysis should be around six journal articles or chapters (about 120 pages).
- Q. *What kinds of sources should I be using?*--A. Vary them. Look at scholarly journals (as found on the Resources section of the course website, journals that can be located in JSTOR, AnthroSource, EBSCO, Blackwell, and Sage, for example, and the key journals used for this course, such as the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* and *First Monday*). Look at newspaper articles (freely available and archived in the database section of the Library website).
- It is not reasonable to expect that you read whole books, but perhaps a chapter from a relevant book, or books, could be useful. Do not rely on books alone. Websites—yes, but be careful; evaluate the credibility of the source. For definitions of unusual words, try using [www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca) and inputting the question “What is [word]” as your search term. *Google Scholar* can be useful for finding references, and sometimes for getting access to a copy of a book online, but you might only get a few pages of the original and not enough to judge whether the conclusions you draw are valid.
- Q. *Do all my sources have to be written by academics, or anthropologists, or sociologists?*--A. No, not all. If you steadfastly avoid using *any* academic

sources, and *never* consult even a single item written by a social scientist, reasonable suspicion will mount. Why is this student simply dismissing an entire corpus of literature?

- *Q. Does my paper have to be twenty pages long?*--A. No. That is the maximum limit that you must not exceed. The course director will not read anything after the 20<sup>th</sup> page, and will grade the paper as if it lacked a conclusion.
- *Q. Can I state my opinion?*--A. Absolutely...it is a must. You are not only encouraged to do so, but it is inevitable, since any writer has an opinion and that perspective will inevitably frame what is presented in the paper, and how it is presented. You can never be absent as an author. What is more problematic is where one's opinion stands alone, without any reference to any other work, without a dialogue with other opinions. That is a monologue, or at worst the kind of harangue one might get in some newspaper editorials, and not a research paper.
- *Q. What about a personal story?*--A. That is fine, but don't let the paper degenerate into a kind of "anthropology of me." In other words, there is no excuse for not reading.
- *Q. I am new to research essays, and Max, quite frankly I still don't get how I am supposed to find sources. Where can I get some real help?*--A. At the Library. Check out library workshops for students, offering help on using library materials. Contact the Anthropology subject librarian, preferably by going in person to the Reference Desk and asking for her.
- *Q. Each paper will be on a different topic. How will the papers be evaluated?*--  
A. The evaluation will look for the following:
  - a logical, coherent, and well structured argument
  - a judicious balance between description and analysis
  - awareness, understanding, and application of the most pertinent concepts
  - a strong introduction that indicates clearly what the essay will be about and what its key points will be, with the clear indication of a "problem" or question that motivates the essay
  - an effective conclusion that does more than summarize alone, but delivers a final round-up explanation that ties the paper back to the introduction
  - effective research in terms of the selection of key sources for the paper
  - amount of research done for the essay
  - In other words: *content, organization, analysis*

- Q. *How are the papers graded, in terms of the criteria listed above?*--A:
  - ESSAY FORMAT: 5 points maximum
  - just having an Intro., Conc., paragraphs = 1 point
  - 1 point for a strong, comprehensive introduction (none for an average introduction)
  - 1 point for a good concluding paragraph that does more than just summarize or repeat, but reveals something substantial to be understood by the reader
  - effective writing, clear, concise, without an over reliance on direct quotations to express every thought
  
  - LOGICAL ARGUMENT: 5 points maximum
  - Qualities to look for:
    - clear argument, that is consistent and without contradictions
    - follows the outline of the question posed by the paper itself
    - a reasonable, balanced appreciation of realities that are almost always too complicated to be apprehended in one paper
  
  - CONCEPTS: 5 points maximum
  - selecting, utilizing, defining the concepts one uses to build an analysis
  - using concepts that were necessary to answer the question
  
  - SUBSTANTIATION: 30 points maximum
  - good examples, relevant support
  - judicious selection of materials
  - evidence of significant research, variety of sources
  - in-depth description for papers based on participant observation
  - solid, sound, and significant coverage of relevant theoretical literature for papers based on published research

## RESEARCHING AND WRITING FOR A TERM PAPER

Adapted in part from The Sundance Reader, Third Edition, Web Site by Mark Connelly.  
<http://sundance.heinle.com/reader3e/>

Before you begin working on a research paper in any course, it is important to understand **what a research paper is NOT**.

- x A research paper is not “about” a subject.
- x A research paper should have a thesis -- a clear point of view. It is not simply a generalized discussion of an issue.
- x A research paper is not a summary of everything you can find.
- x Your goal is not to collect everything you can find out about a subject and summarize it. Although you should review as much material as possible, you should select sources that directly support your thesis.
- x A research paper is not a list of quotes.
- x The focus of your paper is your point of view, your commentary.
- x Direct quotations, facts, and statistics may be woven throughout your paper, but they should support your position. Your commentary should do more than simply introduce or link quotations.
- x A research paper does not present the ideas of others without documentation.
- x Research papers must use documentation methods to prevent you from plagiarizing sources. Do not borrow ideas, statistics, or facts without noting their original source.

**A research paper, no matter what the subject, must achieve specific goals:**

- ✓ Constantly refer to the instructor's guidelines.
- ✓ A research paper has a clear focus.
- ✓ The more narrow you make your subject, the easier your paper will be to write.
- ✓ A research paper has a clear thesis.
- ✓ A research paper must express a point of view, not simply report on the ideas of others. The focus of the paper is not the views of others but your opinions and interpretations.

**No matter what your topic, there are a few general strategies you can follow to save time and produce a more effective paper.**

### **1. SELECT PROPOSED TOPICS AND CONDUCT PRELIMINARY RESEARCH**

Develop an overview of your subject by reading background information. Refer to books, encyclopedias, and abstracts to learn basic terms, details, and personalities. Use an Internet search to gain an overall view of current research.

## **2. REVIEW YOUR TOPIC AND NARROW IF NEEDED**

### **3. SURVEY THE RANGE OF EVIDENCE**

- \* Is enough evidence available for your project?
- \* Do sources agree or are there areas of conflict or controversy?
- \* Can you evaluate the quality of sources? Do you detect signs of incomplete research, lapses of critical thinking?
  - Do you note any trends or patterns in the sources?

## **4. POSE QUESTIONS TO SELECT SOURCES AND DEVELOP A WORKING THESIS**

### **5. CREATE A TIMELINE TO KEEP RESEARCH ON TRACK**

Don't allow the research to expand beyond a fixed date. Leave ample time for writing, revising, and editing.

### **6. RECORD INFORMATION NEEDED FOR CITATIONS**

When you take notes, photocopy pages, or print items from the Internet, make sure you record all the information needed to cite the source.

### **7. LABEL OR COLOR CODE SOURCES AND NOTES FOR EASY REFERENCE**

As you collect materials, label them or use Post-it notes to flag reminders so you will know where to use sources.

### **8. AVOID COLLECTING REDUNDANT INFORMATION**

\* Keep the assignment and desired length of the paper in mind as you collect material.

### **9. REVISE YOUR OUTLINE AS YOU COLLECT SOURCES**

As you find sources, sketch out where they might appear in the final paper. If you wait until you collect all the data, you may find organizing them in logical pattern difficult.

\* If you use a computer, save the various versions of your outline so you can return to them if you discard sources.

### **10. PRIORITIZE SOURCES**

Consider which sources are the most valuable and should appear in the paper. Note those sources you would be willing to delete if you run out of time or find yourself writing a paper that is longer than desired.

### **11. WHILE RESEARCHING, KEEP THE FINAL PAPER IN MIND**

Refer to any sample papers your instructor may have given you to guide the type and number of sources you are collecting.

## **12. REVISE AND REFINE YOUR THESIS IF NEEDED**

Once you have completed your research and assembled your resources, you are ready to begin the first draft of the paper:

**1. REVIEW YOUR OUTLINE AND WORKING THESIS** Determine if you should make any changes to your plan, refining your thesis, adding or deleting sources.

**2. FOCUS ON THE GOAL OF YOUR PAPER** In most instances, the goal of your research paper will be to analyze sources and state an original thesis -- not simply summarize everything you have found.

\* Concentrate on your thesis and your ideas, not those of others.

**3. CONSIDER APPROPRIATE MODES FOR DEVELOPING IDEAS** Although your goal may be to analyze or persuade, you may find that some or all of the paper should be organized using one or more of the other modes: comparison, narration, or classification.

**4. DEVELOP A STRONG INTRODUCTION & CONCLUSION** The opening of your paper should announce the topic, present needed background information, clear up any possible misconceptions, and explain your methods. The paper should end on a strong note -- a memorable quotation or statistic, a prediction, or final comment on the topic.

\* You may find it easier to develop the introduction and conclusion after completing the body of the paper.

**\* NOTE: You should also indicate, in a concluding section, what you were not able to cover, what you would have done differently if you had more time, and what future research you think needs to be done on the topic you have chosen.**

**5. KEEP THE LENGTH OF THE PAPER IN MIND AS YOU WRITE** As you write you will probably come up with new ideas or discover that it takes longer to fully explain items on your outlines.

**6. COMMENT ON THE QUALITY OF SOURCES** Briefly evaluate your sources as you introduce them into your paper, commenting how statistics were gathered, a writer's possible bias, or the limitations of a government study.

**7. USE QUOTATIONS SPARINGLY** Do not feel obliged to fill your paper with long blocks of quotations -- unless they serve a key purpose and cannot be summarized.

**8. REFER TO YOUR THESIS AS YOU WRITE** Make sure that any new ideas you develop support your thesis and do not stray from the goal of the paper.

**9. ASK YOUR INSTRUCTOR FOR HELP IF YOU RUN INTO DIFFICULTIES.**

## CITATIONS

**You do not need to use citations for every fact, quotation, or idea you present:**

- x Common expressions or famous quotations
- x Famous sayings by Shakespeare, Jesus, or Benjamin Franklin such as "To err is human" or "I am the resurrection" do not have to be cited, even when presented as direct quotes.
- x Facts considered in the "realm of common knowledge"
- x You do not have to provide a citation if you referred to a source to check a fact that is readily available in numerous sources. You do not have to cite The Encyclopedia Britannica if you used it to find out where Arthur Miller was born or when North Dakota became a state. No one will accuse you of stealing facts that are commonly known, not subject to change, or interpretation.

**In almost every other instance, however, you have to acknowledge the use of outside material:**

- ✓ Direct quotations
- ✓ Whenever you quote a source word for word, you must place it in quotation marks and cite its source.
- ✓ Indirect quotations or paraphrases
- ✓ Even if you do not copy a source but state the author's ideas in your own words, you must cite the source. Changing a few words or summarizing a page of text into a few sentences does not alter the fact that you are using someone else's ideas.
- ✓ Specific facts, statistics, and numbers
- ✓ Data will only be credible and acceptable if you present the source. If you state, "Last year, 54,450 drunk drivers were arrested in California" readers will naturally wonder where you obtained that number. Statistics only make credible evidence if readers trust their source.
- ✓ Graphs, charts, and other visual aids
- ✓ Indicate the source of any graphic you reproduce.
- ✓ You must also cite the source for information you use to create a visual display.

### **Using Direct Quotations:**

Although direct quotations should be used sparingly, they serve an important purpose in developing a research paper.

Use direct quotes:

- ✓ When presenting a significant thought by an authority



- ✓ When the material is unique and memorable
- ✓ When the idea conflicts with the mainstream of thought
- ✓ When presenting statistics and technical data
- ✓ When the original statement is well-written and more compelling than a summary or paraphrase
- ✓ When readers may question a controversial point of view

### Blending Quotations With Commentary:

Quotations should be blended into your text to prevent awkward transitions and confusion. Avoid "hanging quotations" that are not linked to your writing:

In the 1950s the Hollywood studios were threatened by the advent of television and loss of their right to own theaters. Leading screenwriters were blacklisted as Communists. "These were the dark days of American film" (Smith 10). But Technicolor and other special effects were seen as ways of winning back audiences and increasing profits.

### Link quotations to your text:

In the 1950s the Hollywood studios were threatened by the advent of television and loss of their right to own theaters. Leading screenwriters were blacklisted as Communists. Jane Smith recalled, "These were the dark days of American film" (10). But Technicolor and other special effects were seen as ways of winning back audiences and increasing profits.

### Editing Direct Quotes

Using direct quotations can present problems. In some instances the full quotation contains extraneous information or makes references not explained in the immediate text. You can delete unnecessary information by using ellipsis -- three periods indicating where words or phrases have been eliminated:

Original Text:

*Franklin Roosevelt, who served as governor of New York before becoming president, used Al Smith's New York Plan as a model for the New Deal. - Nelson Jones*

Edited Quotation:

Nelson Jones observed, "Franklin Roosevelt . . . used Al Smith's New York Plan as a model for the New Deal."

In editing quotations, make sure you do not distort the writer's meaning by eliminating negatives or qualifying remarks. It would be not be ethical to shorten the statement "We should only as a last resort wiretap citizens" to "We should . . . wiretap citizens."

### Inserting Words Into Direct Quotations

You can insert words into direct quotations to clarify points or prevent confusion:

Original Text:

*Frank King had orchestrated fund raising for the NAACP in New York and Philadelphia. Though an outspoken opponent of segregation in the South, King did not endorse using confrontational tactics such as demonstrations. King considered the Montgomery bus boycott a mistake. - Carmen Wilson*

Quoting the last line might naturally lead readers to assume that Wilson's quote refers to Martin Luther King. To prevent confusion, you can insert words or phrases in brackets:

According to Wilson, "[Frank] King considered the Montgomery bus boycott a mistake."

According to Wilson, "King [no relation to Martin Luther King] considered the Montgomery bus boycott a mistake."

### Altering Quotations

You can alter the wording of a direct quotation for grammatical reasons, changing verbs from singular or plural or from past to present to prevent errors or awkward shifts. Changes are indicated by using brackets:

Original Text:

*Poe, Melville, and Whitman are among the greatest American writers. - Karen Wong*

Wong noted that "Poe . . . [is] among the greatest American writers."

### Creating Smooth Transitions

Quotations should not appear as isolated statements but need to be blended into the main text.

Isolated:

*Last year the bilingual program was completely reorganized. "Once we could get by with two or three English teachers who spoke Spanish, but now we must serve students who speak Russian, Polish, Chinese, and Vietnamese" (Lopez 12). The administration is dedicating more resources to meet the needs of recent immigrants.*

Blended:

Last year the bilingual program was completely reorganized. Dean Sara Lopez noted "once we could get by with two or three English teachers who spoke Spanish, but now we must serve students who speak Russian, Polish, Chinese, and Vietnamese" (12). The administration is dedicating more resources to meet the needs of recent immigrants.

or

Last year the bilingual program was completely reorganized. "Once we could get by with two or three English teachers who spoke Spanish, but now we must serve students who speak Russian, Polish, Chinese, and Vietnamese," noted Dean Sara Lopez (12). The administration is dedicating more resources to meet the needs of recent immigrants.

## Writing the Introduction and Conclusion

The opening and closing of anything you write is important. The way you introduce your subject to your reader in the first few lines will greatly determine how they will approach your ideas or even if they will continue reading at all. The introduction of a research paper is especially important because research papers tend to be long and complex.

### The Introduction

Your introduction should accomplish key goals:

- ✓ Grab attention -- open with a quote, fact, statistic, or short narrative.
- ✓ Convince readers that your paper is worth reading -- demonstrate the importance of your subject with details.
- ✓ Explain the basic context of your subject
- ✓ Narrow the topic to a specific thesis that clearly states your position
- ✓ You can also use the introduction to explain or justify your research methods or address reader objections.

## The Conclusion

Your conclusion should accomplish specific tasks:

- ✓ Bring the paper to an interesting, logical end
- ✓ End with a final fact, quote, or comment to provoke readers to accept your ideas and think about the topic on their own
- ✓ Reinforce the main points of the essay without unnecessary repetition
- ✓ Speculate about future action
- ✓ Indicate gaps, where future research is needed, what you would have done differently, and what you would have wanted to do in addition.

## **Critical Thinking and Bias**

A brief overview of several critical thinking skills is important when assessing views:

- ✓ Distinguishing Fact from Opinion and Bias from Reason
- ✓ Distinguishing Between Primary and Secondary Sources
- ✓ Evaluating Information Sources
- ✓ Recognizing Deceptive Arguments
- ✓ Recognizing Ethnocentrism and Stereotypes

### Distinguishing Fact from Opinion and Bias from Reason

This skill focuses on distinguishing between a statement based on fact (one that can be proved true) and a statement based on opinion (one that expresses how a person feels about something or what a person thinks is true). The ability to distinguish between these two types of statements is the essential first step to critical reading. Whether reading a newspaper or magazine, listening to a disagreement, or preparing for a debate, you can become a more sophisticated consumer of information if you can identify the speaker's viewpoint.

When first learning to assess this skill, you may be tempted to identify statements of fact as "important" and statements of opinion as "irrelevant" or "unimportant." It's important to remember that a factual statement may be false or taken out of context and thus be misleading. Likewise, on some issues, a statement of opinion might be the most important of all. The point is to practice distinguishing the difference between a fact and an opinion, not make evaluative judgments about them.

The hardest statements to label will be those that include statistics or other objective proof, yet are not merely fact. It is fairly easy to recognize that "two percent of all teenagers commit suicide" is a statement of fact. However, by adding another

factor-"The high rate of divorce is responsible"--the "factual statement" becomes an opinion. You must be aware of such pitfalls.

### Distinguishing Between Primary and Secondary Sources

A primary source is original material or information that has not been interpreted by another person. Examples of primary sources are court records, government documents (like the Constitution), letters, some documentary films, memoirs, and position papers of organizations, original research, and editorials. A secondary source is made up of information collected from numerous primary sources that is interpreted by the collector. Examples of secondary sources include histories (such as a history of the Constitution and its framers), many magazine articles, and critical analyses.

Primary sources often have the immediacy of an eyewitness. They can provide details that may not be available to an outside observer or scholar. But they may also present information in a manner colored by the author's personal views or experience. For example, a Palestinian describing his life under Israeli rule gives a valuable personal account of what conditions are like. Yet in looking at such an account, one might ask whether the author's individual experiences are typical of the average Palestinian. Is his account affected by his political views or affiliation? The reader must presume that this eyewitness account would be different from a version given by an Israeli living in the same town. Both accounts might be accurate, in which case you would have to consult other primary and secondary sources to gain an understanding of what life on the West Bank is like.

A secondary source may or may not offer information that is more analytical and comprehensive than that found in a primary source. The secondary source author has the advantage of hindsight and, in many cases, access to several primary sources and thus to several perspectives. The author may have more of an objective distance from the events being depicted. But a secondary source is only as factually accurate as the primary sources it uses. And the secondary source author may write an account as colored by personal views as an eyewitness might. Thus a secondary account of Palestinian life on the West Bank in a newspaper that targets a Palestinian audience might reflect and reinforce the publication's editorial stance about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Some sources are not clearly primary or secondary and must be considered carefully. For example, is a television documentary a primary or secondary source? On the one hand, it contains visual presentation of primary sources, such as interviews. On the other hand, the interviews and the presentation of the topic in general are a product of the filmmaker's interpretation of what is important in covering the topic. In this case, the source could be both primary and secondary.

## Evaluating Information Sources

In addition to identifying whether a source is a primary or secondary source, you must also learn to discern what information is most valuable for completing an assignment or report. You probably have been told that all information, no matter how objectively presented, has a point of view. When Time magazine promises to "put the world in your hands," it is really promising that its staff will gather and condense what they consider the top stories of the week into a concise, convenient package. Although such a product is not a bad source of information, it is not a perfectly objective, all-knowing source, either. Its content is the reflection of the biases, both political and cultural, of the magazine's editors and publisher and also of their limitations in time and resources when trying to cover world events on a weekly basis.

You should critically examine sources of information to determine point of view and to find out how this point of view affects the accuracy of their coverage. When examining a source of information, check the author's previous writings or his/her relationship to the events being written about. Is the author a member of a partisan organization involved in a dispute being portrayed? Has the author shown a consistent stand on the topic in previous writings? In addition, you should look at other articles on the topic in the same publications. Is there a consistent point of view? Its point of view can also be discerned by comparing its information with other sources that are known to have opposing views on the same topic. Learn to question a source: What are its intentions? What are its biases? What does it gain by presenting a particular perspective?

A source should also be evaluated for its timeliness. It must give information that adequately reflects the time period of the topic being covered. For example, when writing about a topic such as the protest movement during the Vietnam War, you may consider a variety of sources in order to write on the topic. While you may want to look at histories of the protest movement first, to get an overall impression, you will also want to look at eyewitness accounts of participants in the movement, as well as opponents of it. A mixture of such accounts from both the time period of the war and those written later might also be useful. The sources written after the war may bring some historical distance to their discussion of the topic. But the sources written during the war give direct evidence of why people were opposed to it.

Beyond determining the point of view and timeliness of an information source, you must also judge its usefulness. You must determine whether the source deals with the aspects of the subject needed for the research project. You should know that some sources will be more directly useful for writing about the topic, while some will provide valuable background information, while others will have only marginal value at best.

In evaluating a source, you should determine whether the author's intention is appropriate to serve your needs. A scholarly secondary source, for example, would be more useful in providing an in-depth historical perspective on a topic than seventy seconds of documentary film footage on a television news program. On the other hand, the news story may contain quotes that give useful information or insight into a topic. All of these factors should be considered when determining the usefulness of a source.

### Recognizing Deceptive Arguments

The ability to distinguish between deceptive and logical reasoning is an essential skill in critically analyzing written and oral arguments. The danger of deceptive arguments comes from their misleading nature, which may cause you to reject a valid opposing argument or embrace an argument that has little rational merit. Deceptive arguments often distract people from the vital issues and focus their attention on matters of little importance. For example, an author who writes on animal experimentation argues: "All animal liberationists do, ridiculously, claim that their movement is just a logical extension of the more serious and legitimate black and women's liberation movements." By generalizing about animal liberationists, and then by ridiculing their argument, the author diverts attention away from the issue and focuses instead on animal liberationists' sense of priority. Whether animal rights deserve equal attention with civil rights is an interesting topic, but it may have little bearing on how experimental animals should be treated. In labeling a part of the argument as ridiculous, the author aims to invalidate the entire issue.

Many writers are skilled at using emotional appeals to sway readers in support of irrational arguments. For example, one author writing on the issue of criminal justice contends, "Crime in the United States is up by 300 percent--which goes to show that the criminal justice system is incapable of dealing with crime." The author exploits the public's fear of an escalating crime rate, yet offers no solid evidence of a link between the quality of the criminal justice system and a rise in crime. The quoted statistic has little relevance unless the author can prove that crime rates rise when criminals have no fear of being punished.

By reading and evaluating opposing views, you will become more proficient at recognizing deceptive arguments. Many arguments seem reasonable at first reading; however, once students read the opposite opinion, they are forced to decide between two apparently equally plausible arguments. Though opponents may use the same statistics and even the same logic, they may reach different conclusions.

There are innumerable types of deceptive arguments. To facilitate discussion, the examples below fall into eight broad headings.

**Bandwagon**--the idea that "everybody" does this or believes this.

Commonly held beliefs are not necessarily correct beliefs. One author, for example, writes: "History shows that when millions of Americans want something (ie., drugs) they'll do anything to get it . " The author attempts to rationalize the legalization of recreational drugs because "everyone is doing it."

**Scare tactics**--the threat that if you don't do or don't believe this, something terrible will happen.

This argument is commonly used during emotional discussions or debates when dealing with topics that concern the public's well-being. One AIDS commentator writes, "Federal action is essential if the 'Typhoid Mikes and Marys' of the AIDS epidemic are to be prevented from continuing to infect others individually and en masse." Alarming words such as "typhoid," "epidemic," and "infect" alert readers to the author's intent to frighten the reader into believing his/her argument.

**Strawperson**--distorting or exaggerating an opponent's ideas to make one's own seem stronger.

A popular method of creating a strawperson is to distort and exaggerate an opponent's argument and dissect it, thereby ignoring the genuine issues and attempting to invalidate the entire argument through attacking an inflated misrepresentation of its main points. An author writes, "The warped logic of the men and women who are more concerned with bleeding hearts than bleeding bodies goes something like this: 'It is prejudice and poverty that forces young people to break the law.'" The writer uses inflammatory language and states the opponent's argument in one simple sentence, making the argument seem ridiculous. The author creates this exaggerated argument, or strawperson, to more easily knock it down.

**Personal attack**--criticizing an opponent personally instead of rationally debating his/her ideas. One author attacks animal rights supporters: "Their sweeping indictments of science and technology, their portrayals of science as a force beyond political control, might lead a weak mind to conclude that extraordinary evils require extraordinary solutions." The author personally attacks and categorizes animal rights activists rather than proving his own point.

**Testimonial-quoting** or paraphrasing an authority or celebrity to support one's own viewpoint.



Testimonials can be used to legitimately further an argument if the person quoted is truly a well-respected authority. However, testimonials often come from people who have little or no experience in the field debated. A U.S. senator's wife may argue, for example, music lyrics that contain violence or sexism may lead to violent or sexist acts. However, whether this woman's opinion should be more heavily regarded than any other's is arguable. Her husband's fame gives her statements false credibility.

However, testimonials can be used legitimately. Quoting an expert on a given topic may lend more validity to an argument. The reader should keep in mind, though, that the quote may be taken out of context or used in a manner the speaker did not intend.

**Slanters**--to persuade through inflammatory and exaggerated language instead of reason.

The adjectives used to describe people or their political positions often reveal the author's prejudiced beliefs. Many authors do not intend to display their bias, but the words they use send a signal to careful readers. Flagrant slanters, however, are relatively easy to spot. One economics author writes, "The titanic expansion of bureaucratic power is shattering the foundations of a free society and menacing the well-being of every citizen. Words like "titanic," "shattering," and "menacing" are obvious clues to the author's beliefs on government control. The author employs inflammatory words, rather than a solid argument, to persuade readers that large government programs threaten society.

**Generalizations**--using statistics or facts to generalize about a population, place, or thing.

This argument can be difficult to recognize if the generalization is a statement the reader already accepts. The reader's preconceived ideas about a topic can hinder his/her ability to distinguish between factual statements and generalizations based on personal opinion.

A commentator writing about Latin America states, "Latin American societies do not encourage new ideas. They are unconcerned with the task of changing the world in which they live." Not all Latin Americans would agree with that statement, but a reader with limited exposure to the topic might not understand the controversy such a statement generates. In generalizing, authors exclude the possibility that alternatives exist, thereby severely limiting debate.

**Categorical statements**--stating something in a way implying that there can be no argument.

"Animals are in no sense the moral equals of humans, and therefore we are under no moral obligation to refrain from using them for experiments." This author suspends the debate with a broad statement that assumes that any further discussion would be futile. Categorical statements squelch the open exchange of ideas by denying the possibility that logical alternatives exist.

Recognizing deceptive arguments is pivotal to the evaluation of opposing viewpoints. Many writers attempt to manipulate readers through emotional pleas, scare tactics, and other devices. By coming to understand these techniques, you will become more adept at reading and thinking critically.