

## Essay 3: Inquiry into a Subject—The Discovery Essay

*The motive for writing a research essay...is not to prove but to discover.*

---Bruce Ballenger

### WHAT'S THE ASSIGNMENT?

As its name implies, the Discovery Essay gives you the chance to find out something you really want to know or need to understand better. To do so, you'll be engaging in the process of discovery that motivates virtually all academic work. Key to the process is **asking a real question**—one with some complexity, that does not have an easy or obvious answer—and then **exploring a wide range of current, reliable, authoritative sources that represent a variety of perspectives**. Good research questions rarely have a single answer—there may be multiple answers, conflicting answers, or no answer (yet). The best kind of research takes you somewhere you didn't expect, leads you to question your assumptions, or provides new insight into a subject you thought you knew well.

### WHAT'S THE PROCESS?

After doing some brainstorming in class and **forming a research question**, you'll create a **bibliography** of possible sources. You'll then **evaluate these sources**, choosing **at least five** that help you answer your research question by providing a **variety of perspectives** on the subject. (You're not discovering much if all your sources say the same thing.) **Read—and reread—your sources carefully, taking notes** that record both what the authors are saying and what you think about what they are saying (**you'll use a dual-entry journal**, which we'll discuss).

In writing your Discovery Essay, you'll turn your attention from researching your subject to describing your findings for an audience. More specifically, you'll **1) describe your interest in the subject; 2) present a synthesis of what others have to say about the subject and 3) reflect on the significance of what you've discovered**. An important objective of the assignment is to give you practice using academic sources to explain a complex subject (and citing them properly) while also including your thoughts and voice in the piece. You're won't just be summarizing what others have said—you'll be showing readers what your sources say and **explaining why it is interesting or important** to discovering the answer to your research question. Remember: you are not writing an argument. You are researching the answer to a question you have, and you may come to a conclusion by the end, but your job is NOT to convince us of what answer is right.

Finally, feel free to **use images, hyperlinks, or graphs** in this piece if they help you explain your subject. Just be sure to **cite them properly**.

**Final Draft: 1,600-2,100 words (approx. 5-7 pages) with works cited in MLA format, plus author's notes**

<b>First Draft Due</b> , with author's note, to the course website for peer response.	
<b>Revised Draft Due</b> , with author's note	
<b>Portfolio Draft Due</b> , with author's note	

*Course outcomes met:*

- ❖ *Demonstrate competency in reading, quoting, and citing sources, as well as competency in balancing your own voices with secondary sources*
- ❖ *Write in a range of genres, using appropriate rhetorical conventions*
- ❖ *Demonstrate the ability to employ flexible strategies for generating and revising your writing (such as: invention, drafting, revising, recording, and editing)*