COML 509
Research Paper

Write an 8 – 12 page paper that investigates one of the topics listed below—or, with my permission, one of your choosing. All citations must be done in APA format. The APA stands for the American Psychological Association. Most scholars working in the social sciences use APA format for citations. Many style manuals (e.g., Kirszner and Mandell’s (1986) *The Holt Handbook*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) will summarize APA format. You can also find summaries on-line. This does not mean that the paper is, strictly speaking, an APA paper. For instance, an abstract is not necessary. The paper is to be double-spaced with 1 inch margins all around. It must have a title page with the paper’s title, your name and email address.

Here are a handful of stylistic suggestions. You will find many others in any writing handbook, like the venerable *Elements of Style*, or the even more venerable *Chicago Manual of Style*:

- Use “I” instead of the stodgy “the author,” as in, “I think,” as opposed to, “it appears to the author.”
- Avoid impersonal verb constructions (“it appears”).
- Write in the active voice (“I did” rather than “It was done by me”).
- Pay attention to the relationship a comma and enclosing quotation marks (“I did.” rather than “I did”.
- Avoid using a plural pronoun with a singular antecedent (“A colleague said that she…” rather than “A colleague said that they…”).
- Explicitly divide the paper into sections. These sections may either be numbered, named, or simply indicated by a longer than normal break between paragraphs.
- State your topic. Somewhere towards the end of the first or second paragraph, write a topic sentence or two telling the reader what you intend to argue or demonstrate or tell about.
- Redeclare your topic. Towards the beginning of your ultimate or penultimate paragraph, recap, in a subtle way, what you’ve argued or demonstrated or told about. By “subtle,” I mean don’t produce an explicit list of your arguments. Scientific writing is often done this way. But scientific writing is about conveying information and is usually not a pleasure to read. Make your work a pleasure to read.

You must have at least five sources in your bibliography. The following are all fine (but they don’t exhaust the list of acceptable sources):

- *The New York Times*
- *The Washington Post*
- Important international newspapers like *The London Times*
- *The Economist*
- *The New York Review of Books*
- Any peer-reviewed journal or conference proceeding
- Any book whose author is a recognized expert in the area you are investigating
• Trade journals are OK, but they should not form the bulk of your sources.
• Flagship journals from professional societies like The Communications of the ACM, IEEE Computer.
• Any Sage periodical

This does not mean that you may not cite web sites. They can give a flavor for what is going on in an area. Nevertheless, you must have five sources that are from the acceptable list.

This is a formal paper. This means that you may not cite your friends, your teacher, or some other personal source, newspaper fashion. You should also avoid citing someone’s opinion to buttress an argument. Something like this is interesting in a newspaper, but not OK in a formal paper:

Harry Smith, 49, CEO of Internet Dynamics, says that “within five years you’ll be seeing an XYZ device in every household.”

Even if Harry is an expert, this is still his opinion. Instead, look at government, academic, and, yes, trade sources for actual data.

Here are forty-two suggested areas of investigation. I used the phrase “areas of investigation” deliberately. You have to specify your topic within the area after some initial reading. You may, of course, investigate a topic of your choosing. Before you do this, you must check it out with me first.

1. Voting Machines. A lot of attention has been paid to voting machines lately. What are the problems, promises? What is done in other countries. There are articles the ACM Queue (10/2004) and The Communications of the ACM (10/2004) that should get you started.

2. Identify theft is gathering increasing attention. What is it? Why now?


5. File sharing software. What is it? What is its history? Has it hurt the recording industry (see, for example, The New York Times, 11/21/04)? How does it relate to similar controversies over VCR and photocopying machines? What is the current (as opposed to 2004) legal/business/technical state of file-sharing.
6. Walter Ong had lots to say about the distinction between oral/aural cultural forms and written/read cultural forms. Marshall Mccluhan, a teacher of Ong’s had lots of interesting things to say in the late sixties about electronic media. What did Mccluhan say? What are people saying about Mccluhan now?

7. Do an Ong-like analysis of a particular computer-mediated communications technique like email. You will find that linguists have been dipping into this area. Denise Murray’s article, “The Language of Cyberspace” is an interesting starting point. Find it in Finegan & Rickford (2004), Language in the USA, Cambridge U. Press.

8. Who are Robert Tappan Morris and Kevin Mitnick. What did they do? What did commentators think about what they did? What are they doing now?

9. Ellen Ullman has written a novel plus a lot of other essays. You will read one of her essays in Module 8. Review her novel in light of what she tells you about herself in her essays.

10. What has Chomsky said about the media since Manufacturing Consent. Who is Edward Hermens? What do commentators say about Chomsky?

11. Many companies are outsourcing their tech jobs to India and other places, as well as importing foreign engineers. See articles 11 and 12 in my Computers in Society, 08/09 for starters.

12. Economists have differing opinions about computers and productivity. Investigate the current thinking. See article 5 in my Computers in Society, 05/06 for a start.

13. How private are electronic communications? See articles 13, 14, 15 in my Computers in Society, 05/06 and article 16 in my Computers in Society, 08/09 to begin.

14. What is the origin and current meaning of the term “multitasking?” How does it relate to productivity? See an article by Matt Richtel in the 7/6/03 issue of The New York Times.

15. How does Google work and what effect is it having on discourse. See articles 21, 22 in my Computers and Society, 05/06 for a start.

16. Why are there so few women in computing? See my “Sample Research Paper” under the syllabus tab for a start.

17. Is it true that women make up the bulk of text-based on-line game players? Why?

18. What effect is spam having on email. See articles 34, 35 in my Computers in Society, 05/06 for a first look.

19. The Sherry Turkle article we read in class (Module 8) is from the mid-80’s. What has she said recently about computer-mediated communication? Her latest book, I believe, is called Life on the Screen. She has a web site that lists here own work.
20. A lot has been said about pedophiles on the Internet. What is actually known?

21. How large is the Internet pornography business? What part of Internet traffic is devoted to pornography?


23. What is it about computers that make them so hard to use and so prone to failure? See my article in the Winter, 2005 issue of The American Scholar and article 7 in the 08/09 edition of Computers in Society.

24. Fraud is always a risk when making anonymous transactions over the Internet. See articles 5, 19, 31, and 32 in the 08/09 edition of Computers in Society for a first look.

25. Spyware is an increasingly worrisome side-effect of networked computers. How serious is it? See Roger Thompson’s article in the August 2005 issue of The Communications of the ACM to get one perspective.

26. What happens to the mountains of computing equipment that we all discard? See the January 30, 2005 issue of The Progressive for one answer.

27. Internet dating appears to be a growing phenomenon. See articles 17 and 18 in the 08/09 edition of Computers in Society. Says the Lori Gottlieb, the author of a piece on that subject in the 3/2006 issue of The Atlantic: “My matches included a film editor wearing a kilt—and not in an ironic way. Was this the best that science could do?”

28. Who are Lori Drew and Megan Meier? Thurlow considers virtual identities in Strand 2, Unit 2. MySpace and Facebook have become a larger presence since Thurlow was published in 2004. What do other scholars have to say about virtual identities?

The following topics are taken from the text. To use any of these, adapt them to a research paper format.

29. Question 2, p. 34, Thurlow.
30. Question 1, p. 44, Thurlow
31. Question 2, p. 44, Thurlow
32. Question 3, p. 44, Thurlow
33. Question 1, p. 56, Thurlow
34. Question 2, p. 56, Thurlow
35. Question 1, p. 80, Thurlow
36. Question 1, p. 93, Thurlow. The question has a misprint. “1900s” should be “1990s.”
37. Question 4, p. 94, Thurlow
38. Questions 1, 2 p. 106, Thurlow
39. Questions 3, 4, p. 117, Thurlow
40. Question 2, p. 128, Thurlow
41. Question 4, p. 147, Thurlow
42. Question 3, p. 159, Thurlow