

STATISTICS IN THE WORLD: ESSAY 1  
Jo Hardin

Find a fictional character for whom something random happens. Interpret their resulting behavior through the lens of a nonfiction text of your choice.<sup>1</sup>

Your essay should be accessible to a general reader who may be unfamiliar with both the work of fiction and the lens text. 1200 - 1500 words (ish).

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pick a fictional text (novel, film, etc.) and a character of interest to you in that text. At some point in the text, the character should be involved in a *random / chance / fateful* occurrence. The occurrence could be a single event or a sustained pattern of behavior. The occurrence / behavior should have consequences.
2. Select a *lens text* through which you will describe the character's choices and behavior. Your lens text may be one of the class readings or something you find on your own. Note that the Utts text (see the end of chapters 17 and 18) lists many articles you could choose as your lens. Ideally, the lens would be an academic article (and not a textbook or media article).
3. Write an essay in which you explain the behavior of your primary character in terms of your primary lens. The idea is for you to use your lens text to illuminate the character and their actions. When it goes well, you and your reader will learn something new and interesting.

ASSIGNMENT TIMELINE

It is a good idea to re-read or re-watch the work of fiction, perhaps more than once. A strong essay stays close to the text, which means that you will want to become closely familiar with your chosen work of fiction.

**Pre-library preparation.** Write up some notes with the following information:

- The name of the fictional text and the name of the character.
- Descriptive adjectives and behaviors that are particular to that character.
- A summary of the plot, identifying the key juncture where a choice is made in the context of a random event.
- Consequences and transformations resulting from the choice.
- The name of an academic field in which you will seek a lens text.

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Vin De Silva, Mary Martin, and Kara Wittman for their ideas and suggestions on the essay prompt.

Bring your notes with you to the library session on Thursday, September 16

**Library Session.** We will have an orientation session with the librarian. Bring your notes with you. During the session you will have the opportunity to carry out library research on your topic. Please arrive a few minutes early so that we can start promptly.

*Thursday, September 16, Digital Tool Shed, Honnold Library.*

**Preparatory micro-essay.** A pitch to the editor who will publish your essay. Give an outline description of the fictional character and the possible lens text (or idea for lens text), and indicate how you plan to apply the concepts in the lens text to the character's choices. Include ideas for a specific thesis statement you could argue (but do not expect the thesis to be in a final form). Because the point of the essay is to put the texts in conversation with each other, the most likely thesis statement will be to say something about the fiction text in light of the lens text (a thesis statement about all people is too hard to argue). 500 words maximum.

*Friday, September 17, 11:59pm to Sakai.*

**Version 1.** A complete and polished essay. The thesis statement should be clear, but it may have evolved through the process.

*Monday, September 27, 11:59pm to Sakai.*

**Peer review.**

*Thursday, September 30.*

**Essay conference.** Please arrange to meet with me or with Chris Meng to discuss your essay. You may also arrange to meet me or Chris at other times in the process, depending on our schedules.

*Monday, October 4 - Wednesday, October 6.*

**Version 2.** A complete and polished essay. Your thesis statement should be clear and well argued.

*Friday, October 8, 11:59pm to Sakai.*

#### ANNOYING FORMATTING DETAILS

Really annoying requirements that will again make it easier to read many papers:

- Identify your overall thesis (the core argument around which the entire essay is organized) **and bold-face it.**
- Identify the topic sentence of each paragraph and underline or *italicize* it.
- Name the file you upload to Sakai: Paper#.LastName.pdf, as in Paper2.Gallup.pdf. (Please upload to Sakai as a pdf document.)
- Be sure that your name, title of the paper, and date are on the manuscript itself.
- Double-spaced with 12 point type and at least 1 inch margins to write comments in.
- Any reference / citation formatting is fine, but please be consistent.
- Print a word-count at the end of your paper.