

MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY

First Amendment Project

The First Amendment certainly is in the news these days, from attempts at censorship, to violations of copyright protections, to filtering of the Internet.

This assignment is designed to get you look closely at a current specific free speech/free press/free expression issue. After looking at the current issue you will need to identify what area of media law is involved and research that issue. A significant part of the report must be your opinion of the issue and how it affects you in your daily life.

The Assignment

Select an expression-clause issue in the news today, describe it, define and describe the First Amendment issue involved (libel, privacy, pornography, censorship, prior restraint, etc.), and then apply the issue to your life.

The paper should have three distinct and significant parts:

1. Describe the current event
2. Extrapolate it to the area of law affected. Include history, prevailing concepts and laws, etc.
3. A discussion of your feelings and how it affects you or how you interpret the issue.

For example:

1. You might describe an incident on the Napster issue. Explain what was going on.
2. Napster's problem stemmed from Copyright law violation. What is copyright law all about and how was Napster violating it?
3. Explain how it affects you. You can disagree with what's happening, but explain how you can reconcile that.

But Napster is too old of an issue, so it is presented here just as an example.

You MUST START with a current news event item that directly relates to the First Amendment/Expression clause, something not more than two months old.

The specific issue in the news is important. A purpose of this paper is to compare the specific with the general. For instance, you might be in favor of gun control -- a Second Amendment issue, so it is not eligible -- until you or a loved one is robbed. Suddenly you feel the need to carry a gun for protection, even though the gun control laws make it illegal to do so. You would need to start your paper with a specific case where gun possession rights are either being curtailed or enhanced; to talk about gun control as a general issue is not enough. Then talk about the global issue of control (history, the current law, the national debate, etc.) and then include personal application and interpretation.

The issue must relate to the expression clause of the First Amendment (see First Amendment lecture). The religion establishment, religion exercise, assembly and redress clauses ARE NOT eligible.

Start by reading the current version of "The State of the First Amendment" at the Freedom Forum (www.freedomforum.org) web site.

Good online sources for additional up-to-date information on First Amendment issues include the following web sites:

- Freedom Forum (www.freedomforum.org)
- First Amendment Center (www.firstamendmentcenter.org)
- Student Press Law Center (www.splc.org)
- American Civil Liberties Union (www.aclu.org)

There also are plenty of current newspaper and magazine sources for this assignment. You might also check at the college library's EBSCO periodical search.

Your typed paper should be 1,000-1,500 words. It may also contain illustrations. There should be a *minimum* of three written sources and they must be properly cited in footnotes or endnotes (a bibliography should be included, but it is not enough).

Note: It is okay to borrow material from other sources --most good research papers do-- but it must be properly cited. Cite quotes or facts. I mark down for material obviously borrowed from other sources but not cited. Please read the following information about citations.

Part of the reason students fail to cite sources properly is that they don't know when and why to cite them. Cite sources when you borrow the words, facts, or ideas of others. Reasons to include citations include:

- To foster academic honesty -- It is okay to borrow from other sources. Scholars do it all the time. But don't pass it off as your own work. Doing so is plagiarism and is grounds at some schools for expulsion. Blatant plagiarism, at the very least, warrants zero on your paper.
- To show you aren't making it up -- When you present facts you want to show that you know what you are talking about. Citing sources adds credibility. If for some reason the information is wrong, then the monkey is on the source's back.
- To facilitate reader's research -- Your citation should include enough information that the reader, whether it be your instructor or someone else, can look up the information and use the information for his/her own research.

Citations **MUST** contain enough information that the reader can easily find the source material. Citing the name of a magazine or a web site, for instance, is not enough. You would cite the magazine, its date, the name of the article, the author and the page number. With web sources list the specific URL of the source (not just the parent site), the title, the author (if possible, otherwise the organization), and the date (web sites change).

There are a number of "official ways" to cite sources. Chief among them are the MLA guidelines and the APA guidelines. Most other citation formats are offshoots of these two. In many cases your instructor may require you to follow one format or another. For this paper, anything resembling either of these two formats will be acceptable. A good online tool, though it costs \$8 a year, is EasyBib (www.easybib.com/)

According to the APA Handbook, you need to document:

- Direct quotes
- Paraphrases (rephrased or summarized material)
- Phrases taken from sources
- Words specific or unique to the author's research, theories, or ideas
- Use of an author's argument or line of thinking
- Historical, statistical, or scientific facts
- Articles or studies you may refer to within your text

You do not need to document:

- Proverbs, axioms, and sayings ("A stitch in time saves nine.")
- Well-known quotations ("The personal is political.")
- Common knowledge (Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, or oxygen's atomic number is 8, or Vincent Van Gogh painted "Starry Night".)

<p style="text-align: center;">Failure to include citations on may result in a lowering of your grade by up to 30%, or three grade levels.</p>

See additional notes on [how I grade this assignment](#) on the course web site. This is NOT AN ESSAY ASSIGNMENT, but a research assignment with an essay component (Part 3).

Again, include not only research material, but original material/opinion. Spelling, grammar, etc. are expected to be of college level. Type double-spaced.

This assignment represents 25 percent of your grade for the semester. Put effort in it and don't wait until the last minute to complete it.

A suggested format for your paper might be:

Part I - Introduction of the current issue should take 1 to 1.5 pages minimum. It often is better to have a minimum of two independent sources so that you get a better description of the issue. Don't waste time introducing the First Amendment; I know what it says. Get to the issue and make sure it is about some specific event.

Part II - The more global issue that explains the general legal issue involved. Explain the issue and include some legal history. This section should be two to three pages minimum and include at least a couple of independent sources.

Part III - Personal application. This is the essay portion of the paper where you not only give your take on the specific issue, but also examine how the specific or general issue applies to your life. You might include sources in this section, but it is possible that you aren't borrowing anything for this section, so sources are less important.

Note: When you save this assignment, make sure your name is part of the title (project-YourLastName.doc). I will accept attachments on this assignment, indeed I prefer them, but you must save as a Word file (.doc) or a Rich Text Format File (.rtf). Do not send as a .wps file.

**Subject Line
J100x - YourLastName -Project**