

The Myth of Meritocracy - Paper 2 Prioritizing Equity

Suggested length: 8-12 pages (not including Works Cited page or Appendix)

Exhibits for analysis: specific to your project

Secondary/Theoretical Material: scholarly research, course readings, class discussions

Assignment Goals: The goals of the assignment are to:

- (1) Research an issue related to equity or meritocracy through critical engagement with primary research and scholarly debates
- (2) Develop a significant question that will allow you to build a strong and interesting argument
- (3) Analyze, interpret, and draw conclusions from your data to develop your thesis
- (4) Advance the conversation on equity/meritocracy by entering a scholarly conversation
- (5) Articulate why your project is significant and worth investigating

Assignment Description: Your second major project is a research project. You will be using both your own analysis of linguistic data and secondary research to examine equity in practice. There are many directions in which you could take this paper, so you should start with something that is of interest to you. You will then craft an original argument based on your analysis of your case study.

Step 1: Topic + Data: The best place to start your paper is with a **contemporary** issue related to the ideology of meritocracy or questions of equity that pique your interest.

This could include:

- contemporary interventions designed to combat the imbalance created by the ideology of meritocracy (such as scholarships, magnet schools, head start programs, affirmative action, student-teacher ratios, small schools movement, restorative justice programs, internships and work based learning)
- areas where the ideology of meritocracy intersects with educational theory or practice (“summer slump,” the model minority myth, standardized testing, college application practices, “school choice,” growth vs fixed mindset, “grit”)
- policies that play indirect roles on educational equity (housing, busing, no-loan policies, racial integration/desegregation)
- OR, applications of the ideology of meritocracy in areas beyond education: (immigration narratives, international aid/microfinance, economic behavior, hiring and firing practices)

This is a long list of ideas that you are welcome to consider, but I strongly encourage you to be creative and innovative in your search for a topic.

Once you have a topic, you need to find exhibits rich in language or interaction that you can analyze to help you build your argument. Using the BEAM framework (which we will discuss in class), think about what data will be your “exhibits?” What will you analyze to create your argument?

Data sources for the paper will vary, depending on your topic and research question. You will need qualitative (not quantitative) language/interactional data about the topic that you are investigating (rather than scholarly analysis of the intervention—although some of those scholarly sources may include exhibits/primary data which you can use). This can vary depending on your research question and topic.

Exhibits may come from news articles, literature or memoirs, TV/film, interviews, podcasts, court cases and rulings, promotional material for specific program, blogs, opinion pieces, websites, etc. Keep in mind that you must have adequate exhibits to explore the topic, not just an interesting idea.

For example: If I am interested in how college based, international service programs navigate the power dynamics of Western, educated students coming to often poor countries and communities of color, my exhibits might be promotional materials from Duke Engage as well as the videos and text on their website.

You may not use data we have seen or discussed in class. You may use non-English data or texts with codeswitching between two languages. However, if you choose this route, you will need to translate the sections of your data which you use in your paper, so keep this additional work in mind.

Step 2: Paper Proposal + Research Question

In order to get feedback on your topic, you will be asked to turn in a proposal by Wednesday, Feb 19th. It should include your topic, what data you will be looking at, preliminary research questions, and why your project is significant. We will be using an adapted formula from *The Craft of Research* ch. 3 (Sakai: Resources: Writing Resources) that we used for paper 1:

“I am studying/examining _____ (topic)
using _____ as my exhibits
because I want to find out _____ (research Q)
in order to help my reader understand _____ (significance)”

A template for the proposal will be posted on sakai. You will get feedback from Dr. Welji on your proposal. You can make changes to your project after the proposal, but please consult Dr. Welji if you plan substantial changes.

Step 3: Collect data to be your exhibits

This step is to help you find the right kind of exhibits for your project. Some of you may find this easily, but this step can help you find more and/or better data (data rich for linguistic analysis!). To help you look beyond a simple google search, we will be meeting with our course librarians, Greta Boers and Madeline Snipes, on Feb 27th, to explore how the library resources can help.

If you are not sure if your exhibits are acceptable or if you have enough data (or too much data!), please come see me. Rather than base the amount of data on quantity, think about the relevance of the exhibits to the argument you are building, and whether the data provides enough material to work with.

While you may already have a research question in mind, as you analyze, sort through, critique, and explore your data, your research question will change and narrow.

Step 4: Data Analysis - getting to a working thesis

In order to develop a working thesis, you need to start by analyzing your exhibits. This process can be thought of as similar to a close reading. We have modeled/will model some of this with the analysis of early interventions into language development (Tuesday Feb. 25), or analysis of audio on the first day of class. You also practiced analysis on your interviews for Paper 1. I encourage you to develop a system to mark up your data. Mark themes, patterns, moments of interest.

A strong thesis comes when you notice something puzzling. Did something catch you off guard? Something unexpected? Something inconsistent? This can often open insight into something you can argue.

At this point in the process, you will each have a chance to check in with me about your analysis and your working thesis.

Step 5: Scholarly conversation

Just like the readings we have done in class, you want to fit your analysis into a scholarly conversation. While the exhibits you select will make up a large part of the evidence for your paper, course readings and other secondary sources will be necessary to support your analysis and further your argument.

In order to help you find those sources, we will be meeting again with our course librarians on March 24th. They will be teaching you skills that will help you long after this course.

You may not find secondary sources on your particular topic. Even if you do, you may want to think about other intersecting themes or other context issues that you can put your paper in conversation with. For example, critical race theory, housing and socioeconomic data, ethnographies of immigration or student life, theories such as cultural capital, linguistic ideologies, language socialization.

The scholarly sources you cite may be used as background material, provide counterarguments or other ways to examine your issue, or help support your argument or analysis (such as other scholars who have used similar theories even if in different ways).

While you may cite “popular” (non-scholarly) sources, you must also cite at least 4 scholarly sources (on top of any relevant course material). Our session with the librarian will help us learn the difference between non-scholarly and scholarly sources.

Step 6: More Analysis

With the addition of scholarly research, you will need to put your exhibit analysis in conversation with the scholarly literature. A synthesis matrix (like we used for Paper 1) will be really helpful. By sorting through your potential claims, you may have to revise your thesis.

Use the argument structure outline (on Sakai: Resources: Writing Resources) to help you sort all your ideas around your argument.

Step 7: Finish Writing

Your final paper will be an integration of your analysis of exhibits and the scholarly/theoretical context in which your paper fits. You should include excerpts of your exhibits (evidence) and your analysis in the body of your text. We will discuss the paper format more in the coming weeks.

Step 8: Revision, Rewriting, Editing

As we have learned so far in the class, papers are better when they get feedback from readers and when revisions and rewriting is an important part of the process. You will have a chance to get feedback from multiple readers as you revise.

Audience: Given the task for Paper 2, I want you to write to an audience who would have the ability to use your information to make change. This would include educational policy makers, principals, government officials, etc. Keep in mind that this audience will not be familiar with course theories, but they are educated and well-versed in thinking about education and equity. Thinking about your audience will help you as you write, especially what your audience needs to have explained, what they might object to/argue against (like ways that equity is generally addressed/ignored), and how to help them understand your conclusions (convince them to take seriously your ideas for what is working and what is not).

Coversheet(s): Your final paper should include a coversheet(s) that reflects on your writing and revision process. Your reflection should touch on the following questions:

- What were the most challenging aspects of writing this paper? How did you overcome them?
- What do you feel are the strongest parts of the paper?
- How did you negotiate the revision process (peer and instructor feedback)? How did it help you improve your paper? What feedback did you take and why? What feedback did you ignore and why?
- What do you think you gained/learned/developed as a writer through this assignment/this semester?

Works Cited Page: Include a works cited page for all cited readings – including course reading, scholarly sources, and your exhibits.

Writing Objectives and Grading: This is adapted from Paper 1.

The goal of the paper is to craft an argument that uses analysis of primary data and scholarly literature to answer a research question about meritocracy and equity. Your paper will be graded on how successfully it:

- Poses a significant research question around the issues of meritocracy or equity with a clear, strong, and arguable thesis
- Makes organized and structured claims that are tied to the thesis and are supported with evidence and analysis of exhibits.
- Counterarguments show ability to argue/think about multiple perspectives and rebuttals strengthen writer's argument
- Writing is situated in a scholarly discussion (situated in secondary research)
- Demonstrates analysis and critical thinking about course content and ideas (beyond class discussion).
- Explains the reason we should care about your findings (significance).
- Shows improvement and engages with feedback.
- Writing is creative, engaging and shows flexibility/risk-taking in writing