

Goal:

The goal of the two writing assignments in this course is to explore ways in which computers and computerization affect our lives. In the first paper we focused primarily on positive influences. Now, in the second, we will turn our attention to controversial or negative outcomes.

Due dates:

Monday, April 9: Submit a 100-200 word (i.e., approximately 1 page) statement describing your chosen topic, along with a bibliography. You should mention which of the questions listed below you intend to answer, and which of your bibliographic sources provides information on each question. Your bibliography should contain at least three works that are not on-line sources.

Monday, April 23: (Optional) You may submit a draft of your paper for me to comment on prior to your final paper submission.

Monday April 30, Wednesday May 2, and Friday May 4: You will give a 10-minute in-class presentation, which should include time for a short question-and-answer session. Please summarize your paper as clearly as possible within the given time frame. You should plan on using some sort of visual aids during your presentation (e.g., handouts, the whiteboard, or the computer projection system) since doing so tends to make presentations much more understandable. Since time is limited, I will need to stop presentations that run over time.

Monday, May 7: Submit your final paper as described below.

Assignment:

For this paper, please choose a topic that explores some phenomenon related to computers or computing that is harmful to individuals, society, or the environment. Preferably your topic should be one that you are not very familiar with at present, but that you would like to learn more about. You may choose an idea mentioned in our brainstorming session (Monday, March 12), or you may choose a topic not mentioned then.

Of course, it is frequently the case that some people benefit from the same phenomenon that harms others. Therefore, your topic may be controversial, seen as a problem by some people, but not by others. In that case, I would like you to address the topic as fairly as possible. You may certainly express an opinion on the issue, but you should also try to present other perspectives in an unbiased way.

Research your topic to enable you to answer several of the questions posed below, and then write a paper describing what you have learned.

Questions to address:

Depending on your chosen topic some of the following questions may be more relevant than others, and you may find that more information is available on some than others. Therefore, you are not expected to answer every question. However, your paper should address *at least four* of the following (numbered) questions.

0. Please give a description of your chosen topic. What is the phenomenon you are addressing?
1. Who are the people that are harmed by this phenomenon? How are they harmed?
2. Is there a flip-side to the issue? If there are also people who benefit from this phenomenon, who are they, and in what way do they benefit?
3. If there is software or other technology involved, can you provide some technical background on how it works? (You do not need to get ultra-technical here. Aim for the level of technicality that I use in lecture.)
4. What is the history of this phenomenon? How did it start? How has it developed over time?
5. Have there been attempts to regulate this phenomenon legally? How effective have the attempts been? What makes the issue difficult to address legally?

6. Have attempts been made to address the issue using technology? How effective have such attempts been? What makes the issue difficult to address with technology?

7. Do you have other ideas on how the issue could or should be addressed?

8. Are there other questions that you have, or that you think your peers might have, about your topic? If so, these are also good questions to answer.

9. Is there a reason that you are personally interested in your topic? If so, and if you would like to share it, please feel free to do so.

Audience:

When writing, it is helpful to have a particular audience in mind. Although I do not intend to distribute your papers to your classmates, I would like you to write as if the intended audience were your colleagues in the course. Indeed, they will ultimately be the authentic audience of your in-class presentation.

Length:

Please write 5-7 double-spaced pages, with reasonable margins (i.e., please use the default margins in your word processing software). Slight deviations from the stated page limits may be acceptable. I would rather receive 4.5 pages of clear and succinct writing than 6 pages of ramble and repeat. Similarly, 7.5 pages is reasonable if it is clear and succinct, but not if much of the content is redundant. Nevertheless, please aim for the given range.

Citation style:

You may use the citation style that is typical in your major, or that you learned in tutorial. What is important to me is that you cite your sources completely and accurately.

Acknowledgements:

As stated in the syllabus, you may seek help when working on your paper. However, if you do, you must acknowledge the individuals who helped you, including describing what help each person provided.

Assessment:

When assessing your paper, I will focus on depth and breadth of content, organization and clarity in the writing, and grammatical correctness. Please proofread your paper before submitting it.

Tips on preparing and giving presentations:

Remember that your peers will not know the material, and it is interesting! It is your chance to share the neat things you have learned.

If you have not given many presentations before, I suggest that you practice your presentation before giving it in class. You should practice out loud, even if you are the only one present. This is an invaluable strategy for determining how long your presentation is.

It may also be helpful to memorize your first few sentences: just enough to get you started. Once you are on a roll and into your topic, you won't need that aid any longer because you will know your topic well.

Research and writing support:

You are welcome to make use of both the Grinnell College Writing Lab and the Grinnell College "Library Lab." In particular, in the Library Lab you can get help from a librarian in researching your topic. Of course, if you do receive assistance from these sources, they should be acknowledged in your paper.

I have provided links to each of these services on the course website.