

Preparing Your Context/Description Paper

Once you have submitted your Initial Project Proposal and have had your topic approved, the next step is to begin your disciplined practices of engaging your research object in detail.

While your Lit Review will articulate the relationship of your research object and methodology to existing peer-reviewed scholarship, and your Analysis Paper will focus on the detailed analysis of your research object using your methodology, the Context/Description Paper focuses on describing the research object itself as a thing to study and building a context for understanding your research object by establishing what it is and the contexts surrounding it that will help readers situate it (describing it in detail in terms of Who, What, When, Why, How, So What and showing where it is located culturally, historically, politically, etc.).

Remember that you have seen examples of this kind of writing in all of the research articles we have read so far in this class, usually near the beginning of the article, where writers establish what they think you need to know about their research object before they show their analysis of it. Accordingly, if you do this Context/Description paper well, it will be a first draft of writing that will find its way into either the first third or second third of your final paper.

As you work your way through this paper, you should cite ALL sources you use to document information, sources you analyze, and sources you critically engage to articulate your point. Cite the sources as full citations in a separate Works Cited section using a standard citation system, such as Chicago or MLA. Unlike your Lit Review and final project, this paper is likely to have more popular media citations than scholarly citations. The Works Cited section is not included in the page count.

The Research Object Context/Description paper will be 5-7 pages double-spaced, and divided into the following subsections:

1) **Introduction.** This section introduces the paper by making an initial claim for why this research object is a productive site of analysis for someone working with the discipline of communication studies, and outlines the overall structure of the rest of this paper.

2) **Description and Context.** This section describes your research object in detail, and will take up the majority of the paper. What is your object? What is it similar to and different from? How would you characterize it as an object of study? If it is a stand-alone text like a movie or TV series/episode, how would you BRIEFLY (in no more than a single short paragraph) summarize the plot and main subject matter of it? What people care about this object, and why? More specifically, who is associated with its production, distribution/circulation/exhibition, and consumption? What is its history? When did it start? How long has it existed, and in what forms? If it is from the past, when did it stop? How was it originated? How is its circulation or exhibition regulated (if it is)? How do people encounter it, particularly through which media? What (if any) conversation is there about this object in popular media forms such as journalism, social media, etc.? What is the scope of the critical conversation about it (including cultural critics and media critics, but not necessarily scholars, who you will engage later in the Lit Review), and what are some main ideas that keep coming up in other people's critical reflections on your object? In short: what is your object, why is it significant, and where is it "located"?

3) **Initial Conclusions.** This section concludes the Context/Description Paper by drawing out your initial observations about the object itself and how it connects to other related (similar and/or different, antecedent, or adjacent) communicative objects that are significant to communication studies scholars. Those conclusions can be in the form of questions you hope to answer later in the project when you dig into your analysis of the object more directly, but you at least should have some very specific observations to share here based on the research you did so far to be able to describe, characterize, and contextualize your research object.