

English 1301
Essay #3: Argument about The American Dream

Important Dates

Thursday, March 20—discuss guidelines for Essay #3

Tuesday, March 25—topic due (typed, in class)

Thursday, March 27—flash research due (on Blackboard)

Tuesday, April 8-Thursday, April 10—student draft review (for assigned students only)

Tuesday, April 15—Writer’s Workshop/revision activity (at least three typed pages; two copies)

Thursday, April 17—final draft due (Blackboard)

Essay Prompt

In class, we have watched a documentary and read several articles that discuss the American Dream. The notion of the American Dream was once a powerful motivation not only for Americans, struggling to build their lives through hard work and sacrifice, but also for immigrants, coming to America for a chance at that elusive but inspiring “dream.” But to what extent does the concept of the American Dream continue to motivate people today? Have we moved away from it? Redefined it? Forgotten about it? What is the American Dream, anyway? Is it a myth or reality? Why? Write an essay in which you argue to what extent, if any, people today have a conception of or the access to the American Dream. In this essay, you will want to define what *you* mean by the “American Dream,” and in doing so, you will most likely generate a specific focus for this admittedly broad topic.

This essay will require you to construct an argument that explores these ideas about the American Dream. Remember that an argument makes a strong debatable claim and backs it up with solid evidence and research. To make your writing more specific, I suggest you focus on a particular topic or research an issue that influences one’s ability to achieve the American Dream, such as education, healthcare, immigration, the economy, or civil liberties. The possibilities are endless, and I urge you to think about this topic creatively and find your own unique voice.

Criteria

A successfully written paper will contain the following components:

- Length of the essay should be at least **five pages, typed, doubled-spaced, and with proper MLA formatting and heading**;
- A strong **thesis statement** that makes clear your argumentative claim;
- Focus on a very **specific issue** related to one’s ability to achieve the American Dream. Make sure the writing does not become too generalized and vague. If at all possible, try to choose an issue in which you have a personal interest;
- A strong, well-supported **argument** that considers the complexity of the issue;
- Use at least **four sources**, not including sources we may have used in class. All of your sources need to be from the library or research databases, though I will allow one credible Internet source that I pre-approve;
- Inclusion of all aspects of **persuasive writing** that are discussed in Chapter 7;
- At least one example each of **formal, simple, and partial attribution**, as referenced in the MLA handout. Other than that, there is no requirement on the number of direct quotes and/or paraphrases you should use. However, remember that this is a lengthy research paper, so you should use plenty of evidence;

- Use of the **MLA Quick Reference Guide** and near-perfect use of direct quotes and Works Cited entries. The Works Cited page should include both the primary and secondary sources;
- Clear evidence of **revision** in each stage of your writing. In other words, your rough draft and final draft should not be the same exact paper;
- Use of **strong grammar, punctuation, and spelling** to the best of your ability.
- If you have made any grade below a C on the previous two essays, you are **required** to either come see me or make an appointment with the Writing Center for this essay;
- **Topic description.** On Tuesday, March 25, I would like you to bring to class a brief, typed description of your topic (a few sentences), and I will let you know if you are on the right track. This description should include 1) the specific focus of your essay, 2) a working thesis statement, 3) why you want to explore this particular issue, and 4) any problems or questions you may have about the issue or the assignment;
- **Flash research.** On Thursday, March 27, you will submit a flash research assignment that makes clear the research sources you plan to use for Essay #3. More information on this assignment will come next week;
- Students who signed up for draft review on Tuesday, April 8, and Thursday, April 10, should e-mail their drafts at least 24 hours in advance for **Student Draft Review**;
- Participation in the **Writer's Workshop**. On Tuesday, April 15, we will have a peer review workshop during class. You must have at least three typed pages and a Works Cited page on this day. Not having a draft on this day or participating in the workshop will result in **one full grade deduction** on your final paper; and
- Your **final draft** is due on Blackboard by class time on **Thursday, April 17**. Please retain all rough drafts, prewriting, sources, and peer review, in case I need to see them.

Parting Words

While this is a broad topic, the key is to finding a very specific way into it. One of the most challenging and important aspects of this assignment is choosing a good focus. I urge you to find a way to write about the American Dream that is personally relevant and interesting to you. You will be spending a lot of time researching, thinking about, and writing about this issue, so you want to choose wisely. Try to find a topic that is creative and unique, something that perhaps no other student is exploring. This will really help your writing stand out. Remember that this essay counts for 25% of your overall course grade, so the time and effort spent on this assignment should reflect that.