

**AP Language and Composition – Research Paper**  
*Politics and the English Language*

**Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*“But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” (George Orwell)*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Choose some form of public communication, verbal and/or written. This communication should be a primary document or source of some kind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. ***Important Definition:***  
**Primary source:** A primary source (primary text, primary document) is (usually) written communication of a period that reflects the viewpoint of an individual or well-defined group. Some examples of primary sources in the traditional sense are letters, memoirs, and speeches, while modern primary sources may include electronically produced forms of communication, such as television shows, infomercials, etc. It is from researching primary documents that historiographers piece together that which we call “history.” (Think about Douglass’s memoir and its effect on our understanding of slavery...) By their nature, primary documents are not objective, but communicate a defined viewpoint, one that less than sensitive readers may miss entirely. Too often, primary documents are taken as fact, rather than facts sifted through the sieve of perspective.

Some examples of primary documents:

- Transcripts from *Desperate Housewives*
- Churchill’s speeches during the war
- FDR’s fireside chat transcripts
- Documentaries
- College marketing mailings
- Newspapers
- Treaties with the Apache Nation
- *Ms. Magazine* editorials
- KKK website

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Think about Orwell’s contention about language and how it can corrupt thought and/or how thought can corrupt language. Examine the primary source(s), and decide how the language of the this primary source manipulates the way people think.

THEN....Devise an argument. [THINK: What do you intend to argue about these documents? How do they use language to influence thinking?]

For example, if you chose to examine transcripts from *Desperate Housewives*, you might notice that there is an anti-male bias in the show. You reach this conclusion because your examination of these original documents (the transcripts) yields many examples of anti-male language. At this point, you can probably formulate a rough thesis: "The writers of *Desperate Housewives* perpetuate a negative image of men through anti-male language." Still rough, but a decent beginning....

Some other examples....

- a) In the "documentary" *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore laced the film with mistruths to intentionally corrupt many Americans' opinions of George W. Bush.
- b) Ku Klux Klan recruiters manipulate Christian imagery in their Internet marketing campaigns as a marketing strategy to attract new members.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. At this point, your paper is merely an opinion-based argument. The next step is to find expert research/testimony to support your thesis. You should have at least one primary document and a minimum of four outside sources that will be cited in your paper (MLA format). In addition, at least one source must be some form of print sources (book, magazine, etc.).

Examples:

- a) A magazine article that shows how ad hominem attacks are used in politics
- b) A research study demonstrating the negative influence of magazine ads.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Have your initial thesis approved.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Research and write your paper. The research paper itself should be between 4-5 pages. Be sure to include printouts or photocopies of all source material, with all relevant passages cited in your paper highlighted. Be sure to properly cite **both the words and ideas of others**, bearing in mind the serious ramifications of plagiarism.