INTRODUCTIONS, BODY PARAGRAPHS, AND CONCLUSIONS FOR EXPLORATORY PAPERS

Many paper assignments call for you to establish a position and defend that position with an effective argument. However, some assignments are not argumentative, but rather, they are exploratory. Exploratory essays ask questions and gather information that may answer these questions. However, the main point of the exploratory or inquiry essay is not to find definite answers. The main point is to conduct inquiry into a topic, gather information, and share that information with readers.

Introductions for Exploratory Essays

The introduction is the broad beginning of the paper that answers three important questions:

1. What is this?
2. Why am I reading it?
3. What do you want me to do?

You should answer these questions in an exploratory essay by doing the following:

1. Set the context—provide general information about the main idea, explaining the situation so the reader can make sense of the topic and the questions you will ask
2. State why the main idea is important—tell the reader why s/he should care and keep reading. Your goal is to create a compelling, clear, and educational essay people will want to read and act upon
3. State your research question—compose a question or two that clearly communicate what you want to discover and why you are interested in the topic. An overview of the types of sources you explored might follow your research question.

If your inquiry paper is long, you may want to forecast how you explored your topic by outlining the structure of your paper, the sources you considered, and the information you found in these sources.

For this OWL resource, the example exploratory process investigates a local problem to gather more information so that eventually a solution may be suggested.

Identify a problem facing your University (institution, students, faculty, staff) or the local area and conduct exploratory research to find out as much as you can on the following:

- Causes of the problem and other contributing factors
- People/institutions involved in the situation: decision makers and stakeholders
- Possible solutions to the problem.

You do not have to argue for a solution to the problem at this point. The point of the exploratory essay is to ask an inquiry question and find out as much as you can to try to answer your question. Then write about your inquiry and findings.

ORGANIZING AN EXPLORATORY ESSAY

Exploratory essays are very different from argumentative essays. In fact, an exploratory essay is likely different from any other essay you’ve written. Instead of writing to convince an audience of the validity of
a thesis, you will be writing to find out about a problem and perhaps to form some preliminary conclusions about how it might be solved.

But there is another aspect of the exploratory genre that is equally important. An exploratory essay is, in essence, a retrospective of your writing and thinking process as you work through a problem. It describes when, how, and why you completed certain types of research. This kind of writing is about how you work through problems that require writing and research. You will have to be introspective and think about your thinking process in order for your essay to turn out well.

Very roughly, then, your exploratory essay may follow this sort of structure:

Introduction
The introduction should outline the problem you explored and why it’s important. In addition, you should briefly discuss 1) some of the problem’s possible causes; 2) the institutions and people involved with the problem; 3) some of the possible solutions to the problem. Include a brief overview of the types of sources you researched during your inquiry.

Body Paragraphs
Body paragraphs should discuss the inquiry process you followed to research your problem. These paragraphs should include the following:

1. Introduction of source (title, author, type of media, publisher, publication date, etc.) and why you chose to use it in your exploration
2. Important information you found in the source regarding your problem
3. Why the information is important and dependable in relation to the problem
4. Some personal introspection on how the source helped you, allowed you to think differently about the problem, or even fell short of your expectations and led you in a new direction in your research, which forms a transition into your next source.

Conclusion
The conclusion should restate the problem you explored, outline some of its possible causes, review the institutions and people involved, and highlight some possible solutions. If you still have any questions about the problem (and it’s ok to have some), you will discuss them here. Talk about why you think you still have questions regarding the problem you explored, where you might look to answer these questions, and what other forms of research you would have to do.
How I Chose My Research Question

After reading “Gun Crazy” by Dorothy Allison, I was intrigued by many of the themes that come from her short essay about growing up in a rural, southern atmosphere. She discusses what it was like for her to grow up around a family that seems to be dominated by men. It seems to bother her that there are certain activities that she is not allowed to participate in, like learning to shoot a gun, simply because she is a girl, and “[g]irls don’t shoot” guns, according to her uncles (399). What is really interesting about this story is that her best friend, Anne, who only has a mother present because her father died, does get to learn how to shoot guns because her mother “thinks a woman should be able to take care of herself” (399). Allison never reveals whether or not her father is around, but it is obvious that she has both male and female adults in her life because of her mother and her uncles; however, it is still possible that Allison grew up in a single-parent home, and it is definite that Anne did. I think that it would be interesting to research whether or not growing up in a single-parent home has any real effect on a child. I would also like to know if the gender of the child compared to the gender of the parent makes a difference. I think this is a relevant question because we hear so much about absent fathers and how this negatively influences children, but I think it would be interesting to find out if this has been proven and if it is only absent fathers that have negative affects on children.
Name: _____________________________                Model Exploratory Exercise

This exercise is designed to help organize the information gathered in response to your exploratory question. At this stage of the pre-writing process, you should have 1) formed a clear question for exploration, 2) researched the question, and 3) read and analyzed the researched sources. The next step in the pre-writing process is to group your researched sources based on the perspective each addresses. By doing this, the focus of your research and ideas will be more organized and beneficial as you begin to write your essay. These perspectives will later become the main points that you develop in the body of the exploratory essay.

Note: The model provided here correlates to the student model exploratory essay that follows.

STEP 1: State the question you plan to explore.

After reading Dorothy Allison's essay “Gun Crazy,” I would like to explore whether or not there is any advantage or disadvantage to children who are raised in single parent households.

STEP 2: Group each researched source based on the perspective from which it addresses your proposed question. In the process of grouping, you should also attempt to choose an organizational strategy that presents the perspectives in the most logical and effective order. This step will assist with unity in the body of your essay because each perspective will ultimately evolve into distinct topic sentences in your essay. Provide at least 3–5 perspectives.

Perspective 1: Child’s academic achievement


   Source 3:

Perspective 2: Child’s relationships with parents and others


   Source 3:

Perspective 3: Child’s definition of gender roles


Perspective 4: Family’s financial resources


STEP 3: Review each perspective closely to ensure that all information is grouped appropriately.
The Effects of Single-Parenthood on Children

In Dorothy Allison's "Gun Crazy," she discusses growing up in a family heavily influenced by males and how this affected her upbringing. There were certain activities she was not allowed to participate in such as learning to shoot guns. However, her friend, Anne, who was raised solely by her mother, did know how to shoot guns because her mom taught her this as a means of protection. It is made clear in the story that Allison has both male and female adults in her life, yet Allison's mother does not find it necessary to teach this skill to her daughter, perhaps because she has also been raised with the idea, “Girls don't shoot” (399). This story raises several interesting ideas, such as why is it that Anne's mother is so inclined to raise her in a way that Dorothy's family would consider masculine and therefore improper given that Anne is a girl? A larger question that this story brings to light is whether or not there are any advantages or disadvantages to children who are raised in single parent households.

There have been numerous studies conducted concerning the role of family structure on various aspects of a child's life. The majority of the studies focus on one specific factor of a child's upbringing and compare children from various backgrounds to determine whether or not the make-up of the family has any correlation with how well or how poorly the child performs in a particular area. Many of these studies also take into account the age and gender of the child as well as the gender of the parent. Most research seems to focus on the common factors of achievements, namely academic, relationships with others, gender roles, and the amount of money coming into the household.

One area of interest for researchers is the achievement of children from single-parent families as compared to those from two-parent families. Researchers Madden and Laurence conducted a study in 1997 that compared the communication skills of preschoolers from single-parent families to those from two-parent families. They found that only “25% of the children from single parent homes were referred for a diagnostic while 44% of children from two parent homes were referred” (5). They suggest that “[p]erhaps the major difference is the quality or amount of parental interaction time after the day care day is over [s]ince a single parent has no other adult present in the home for end of the day conversations” (7). Madden and Laurence also discovered that day care workers were not surprised by the outcomes, as they had observed similar happenings in the day to day functioning of the children (7). Sociologists Sang Min Lee and Jason Kushner conducted a similar study in 2008 and focused primarily on the gender of both parent and child to determine what differences existed in academic achievement, if any. They note many earlier theorists who believe that children adapt better if the parent is of the same gender as the child; however, Lee and Kushner found that this is not necessarily the case. They found “[…] that there are no benefits of living with same-gendered parents on adolescents' academic achievement” (615). They further acknowledge that “[d]aughters in single-father families exceed on reading test scores, English teachers' evaluations, and mathematics teachers' evaluations” (616). Both of these studies illustrate that children from single parent homes do not necessarily face any disadvantages compared to children from two-parent homes, and the children from single-parent homes may actually excel in ways children from more traditional backgrounds do not.

Another area of interest for researchers is a child's relationship with his or her parent as well as with others outside of the single-parent home, and how this affects the child's development. One such study by Risman and Park in 1988 examines the relationships between single parents and their children...
based on the sex of both in an attempt to explain whether or not the sex of the parent influences affection shown to the child. They say that “[f]our out of five equations, the custodial parent’s sex is not, in and of itself, related to reported parent-child intimacy, [or] reported child’s development” (1058). Another study by Sterrett and Jones, conducted in 2009, focuses primarily on African American youth and seeks to explain whether or not co-parents, other influential adults in the children’s lives, have any influence on the children’s coping mechanisms. These researchers felt that co-parents would greatly impact the youth studied; however, they discovered, “Contrary to our hypothesis, youth-coparent relationship quality did not contribute significant variance to youth outcomes in our study[”] and they feel as though good mothering is much more important than outside relationships for a child (434). Both of these studies find that single parents, regardless of their sex, offer adequate support for their children, without the help of other adults, and the diverse time frame in which these studies were conducted shows that this has been the consensus for a number of years.

A third common concern among researchers is how children from single-parent homes define gender roles. It is a common thought among researchers that children from single-parent homes tend to be more androgynous than their two-parent counterparts. Russell and Ellis, who conducted a study in 1991, argue that “[a]ndrogynous individuals should be psychologically healthier and better suited to succeed in our modern day society […]” (1-2). They conclude that “[t]he idea that two parents are always better for our children than one […] should strongly be questioned” as androgyny seems to develop more readily in children from single-parent homes (4). Two other researchers, Hall and Walker, who undertook a similar study in 1995, feel that mother and father roles are tied to gender; however, they also conclude that “[r]egardless of family structure, fathers do more family work when mothers are not around” thus compensating in a single-parent, father-headed household (690). They also argue that “[s]pending less time in family work may not have implications for the well-being of children or for parent-child relationships” and that mothers do not “spend too much time doing family work, nor do fathers spend too little time” (691). Researcher Michael Slavkin’s 1997 study agrees that children from single-parent households seem to recognize more androgynous gender roles, thus allowing them “to be more situationally flexible, using a gender role based on whether or not it is most appropriate for that setting” (5). He also supports the idea that youth from “intact” (two-parent) families seem to be more “conforming” than children from single-parent homes, who are generally more “adaptable” (14-15). Therefore, regardless of the sex of the parent or the child, children from single-parent homes do not necessarily experience any set-backs in developing appropriate gender habits and may even positively benefit from the absence of one parent or the other.

A final consideration among researchers when looking at single-parent households is the role that finances play in providing opportunities for the children. Painter and Levine hypothesized in 2004 that perhaps the make-up of the family is not to blame at all; rather, “[i]ncome from single-parent homes has a large effect on the results because of the variability of income earned over a youth’s teen years” (813). They do agree that there are greater risks for children from single-parent homes such as dropping out of school or having a child out of wedlock; however, they find that “[t]he inclusion of income as a control lowers the coefficient on residing in female-headed households by more than two-thirds” (839). Hampden-Thompson, in a 2005 paper, also considers detrimental effects of residing in a single-parent home such as depression, learning difficulties, or behavioral problems, but argues that “[e]conomic deprivation is a salient mechanism in explaining why children who reside in single-parent homes fare worse than their two-parent counterparts” (1). She also argues that “[w]hen it comes to educational outcomes, a child’s economic resources account for 50 percent of the factors explaining low achievement” (1). Waldfogel, Craigie and Brooks-Gann, in their 2010 study, also discovered that economics are more of a determining factor in a child’s life than the family make-up is. They state, “One clear explanation of the poorer outcomes of children in fragile families is that fewer resources are available to these families, particularly single-mother families” (89-90). Although they do find that children from single-parent families have enhanced social problems, they explain that “[w]hen single mothers have more material and instrumental support, children have fewer behavioral problems and more prosocial behavior” (97). Additionally, Dr. Sarah Brauner-Otto, a Sociologist at Mississippi State University, corroborated in a recent interview that “[s]ome social
science research has found that children raised in single-parent homes are more likely to be single-parents themselves and have lower incomes later in life. But, other research has found that most, if not all, of this supposed effect is actually due to other factors such as family income and education.” Therefore, even though children from single-parent families may experience more social issues, the main cause seems to be finances as opposed to bad parenting or lack of parenting.

By consulting these studies, it is clear that even though there is quite a stigma in America of coming from a single-parent family, there really is not much difference, if any, in how a child is raised, be it by two parents or one. In fact, there are even some advantages for children who grow up with one parent instead of two, as these children likely will be more socially adaptable to various situations. Despite the advantages, the disadvantages cannot be discounted. There certainly is factual evidence that many children from single-parent families experience various hardships; however, these studies indicate that this is in no way the fault of the single parent. Instead, these studies reveal that single parents are generally very good parents who are capable of producing and rearing outstanding children.

Therefore, with this consideration in mind, the responsibility falls on the government and others in society to raise support for these families and their children so that the children will not suffer from economic instability and so that the single parents will not be falsely and unjustly labeled as bad parents. The government needs to mandate more social and academic programs for these children that will help them receive the same opportunities as children from two-parent homes. Also, more attention needs to be paid to whether or not child support is being paid in full and in a timely manner in cases of divorce and separation. These children and their parents deserve the same rights and privileges as everyone else, and until the government demands change, America will continue to ostracize these individuals with no just cause.

Works Cited


Student Model

Journaling—Choosing the Argument

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Journaling:

How I Chose My Argument Topic

Throughout my exploratory essay, I found that there really is no difference in being raised by one parent or two. Actually, there are some positive advantages of being raised by a single mother or single father. However, it is a fact that children from single-parent homes are often looked down upon by others because they are thought to be bad people. Many people feel that they are most likely to become mothers and fathers out of wedlock, to participate in gang-related behavior, to drop out of high school, to decide against going to college, and to be low wage earners themselves upon reaching adulthood, and while this may be true, it is not because of the parenting they received. Rather, it is because their single mothers or single fathers did not have the advantage of two incomes to support them. These children grow up in poorer places often because they are poorer than their two-parent counterparts. Therefore, in my argument paper, I want to discuss what the government can do about this problem, since it obviously is not the fault of the single parents. It seems that there are more after-school programs and scholarships that the government could put into place to help level the playing field for these children who are inappropriately labeled. I want to find out what the government is currently doing to help these mothers and fathers and then decide what they could do on top of this to better the situation. This is an unfair position for both the parents and the children, and it seems that our country and its leaders could do something to aid in the situation.
An Annotated Bibliography for Two Many Parents: 
The Necessity of Single-Parent Assistance

In this personal interview, I spoke with Dr. Brauner-Otto, a Sociologist at MSU, about the effects of single-parenthood on children. She discussed some of the setbacks for these children, such as being more likely to become single-parents themselves and potentially having a very low income in adulthood. However, she agreed with prominent research that most of this can be blamed on the income of the household as opposed to the parenting of the single-parent or absence of a second parent. This will be helpful in my paper because it confirms that economics are the main problem for single parents. This will also give my essay credibility as Dr. Brauner-Otto is a prominent sociologist on campus who is known for her work in the area of family structure.

In this personal article, Dickinson reveals staggering statistics that show just how rampant the problem of single-parenthood has become over the past twenty years. She also acknowledges that she is part of the statistics, as she is a single mother, herself. She discusses what she refers to as the “inside-life” of single-parenthood from a credible perspective. She shares how she and her other single-parent friends have made the best out of their situations and shares strategies they have employed that have helped them to accomplish this. She also shares that she does not agree with the stigma that single parents or their children receive. This source will help me establish credibility by having a personal perspective from someone who has lived this and succeeded in this type of household firsthand. Also, Dickinson’s article will be helpful in establishing different ways that single parents can connect and cope with their situations.

In this article, Ehrenreich discusses welfare assistance in America as it applies to single parents, as well as how minimum wage affects these households. She argues against the idea that putting single-mothers on welfare increases the likelihood that they will keep having children they cannot take care of. She feels that this is an unfair stereotype and uses statistics from various American cities to prove that most people who go on welfare are hardworking individuals who just do not make enough on their own to support themselves, much less their children. This article will help me to show that while the government does offer assistance to single parents, it does not offer enough, and it offers assistance in a way that makes the general public scoff at and belittle those who accept it. This will also help me highlight what individuals who receive welfare really do with the money to build the credibility of hardworking single parents who do not abuse the system.

In this paper, Hampden-Thompson discusses the role of economics in single-parent households across the world. She breaks the countries she studies into groups based on the dynamics of each family type, and she explains the different negative circumstances the children must endure across the countries because of their low economic statuses due to being single-parent children. This would be helpful for my paper because it not only addresses the idea that money is the real root of the problem, but it also offers suggestions about what the governments of these countries can do to ease the financial stress of these families. This article is also essential because it compares America to other countries and will allow me to illustrate how we, as a country, fail to stand out against the rest.


In this study, Painter interviews and observes various families that are structured around absent fathers. He hypothesizes that it is actually income that accounts for the disadvantages faced by children without fathers, and he finds this to be true through his research. He discovers that when the income of a single-parent family is altered, the children within such families perform better and equally to children in two-parent families where the income is comparable. This will be advantageous to my project because it shows that if the income for single parents were to increase, many of the problems faced by children in single-parent homes would be eliminated. This will allow me to confirm, early on in my paper, that money is the issue and that the government has a responsibility to these families.


In this article, Pierce and Frazer discuss various methods for low wage earning women who are the sole providers for their households to combat their small earnings. Some of these suggestions include preparing women to work in nontraditional roles such as becoming mechanics or builders. They also spend ample time discussing the efforts of the Women Working Technical program (WWT), which serves to prepare such women for these nontraditional jobs. This article will be helpful to my research and argument because it presents a practical way that assistance can be given to single mothers. An institution like the WWT is a great model for other programs that could be implemented across our nation to serve single mothers.


Sherman discusses a recent crisis in Broward County, Florida, in which a government program that assists single parents in collecting child support had to be shut down due to economic issues and a lack of resources. The article includes quotes from many officials as well as single parents who discuss the crisis from both sides. The officials feel responsible for letting the citizens down, but they do not see an alternative because they cannot control the national budget cuts. However, the parents are worried because many cannot pay their bills without child-support, and they fear they will no longer receive this support once the organization stops monitoring the situation. This article will serve as a good example of a specific case in which the government is actually hurting single-parents by cutting funding for their aid. This article will also lend me support when I discuss that the financial situation of single-parent families is a national problem that the government must address.

This article focuses on a single mother in Boulder, CO, who is attempting to change her circumstances as well as the circumstances of other single mothers in her area. The Boulder area has begun meetings and support groups discussing possible changes for single parents who are having trouble with childcare and keeping their jobs due to responsibilities outside of the workplace. Some of their suggestions are for businesses to offer more flexible hours to single parents who are the sole individuals who can take their children to the doctor or to other activities. This article is helpful because it offers practical suggestions that private businesses could undertake to help single parents on a small scale. This will help me to focus not solely on what the federal government can do about the situation, but also to look at the broader spectrum of how individual citizens can contribute to the success of these families.


In this newspaper article, Suwanski discusses a mentoring program in Kentucky called Mentor Kids Kentucky that seeks to pair single-parent children with adults in the community to foster relationships that may help the children adapt better to the circumstance of being single-parent children. This program also seeks to help the single parents by alleviating some of the stress that comes with being a single parent who is to not only support the family financially but also offer emotional support and encouragement as well. This article helps me by outlining yet another idea about different programs that could be implemented nationally to help not only the parents of these children, but also the children themselves to better fit in and be accepted by their peers. Again, this article offers me another way to show that the responsibility of serving these families falls not only on the government, but also on concerned citizens.


In this study, the researchers discover that stability is a more important factor than having two parents, especially when it comes to behavioral issues. They spend a majority of their report discussing how they came to this conclusion; however, at the end, they offer practical ways to fix these problems, such as boosting the income of single-parent households as well as providing resources and literature for single-parents that encourage support and stability for their children. This source will be helpful in generating my own ideas about what can be done by the government to aid single parents. It provides a nice overview that I may be able to employ as a structure for my own suggestions and ideas.
Student Model

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An Outline for Two Many Parents:
The Necessity of Single-Parent Assistance

Thesis statement: However, through numerous studies, it has been proven that single-parenthood alone is not responsible for the disadvantages faced by children from single-parent homes; rather, these studies show that the low income earned by most single parents is the real cause of high dropout rates and pregnancies out of wedlock for single-parent children. Therefore, it is the responsibility of our government to assure single-parent children the same economic and educational opportunities that two-parent children receive.

I. Over the past several years, numerous studies have been conducted that seek to discover whether or not the parenting by single parents is the real reason why their children often face disadvantages socially and academically, and almost all of these studies agree that the economics of the family is more of a determining factor than the parenting.
   A. Gary Painter and David Levine Study from 2004
   B. Jane Waldfogel, Terry-Ann Craigie and Jeanee Brooks-Gann Study from 2010
   C. Dr. Sarah Brauner-Otto Personal Interview from 2011

II. There are some grants and scholarships available for single parents; however, most of these favor single mothers and are often difficult to obtain because of the numerous forms and steps required to apply; therefore, the government should make it much easier for single parents to apply for aid and should not be biased against single fathers.
   A. There are numerous websites for single mothers.
   B. Many of the grants rely on lottery.
   C. The government needs a better system for assessing need.
      1. The process should be uniform for all.
      2. More money should be set aside so that no family has to go without aid if they apply.

III. Another way to assist single-parent families is to raise the minimum wage.
   A. Discussion of current minimum wage
   B. Barbara Ehrenreich essay
   C. Discussion of cost of living increase due to recent recession

IV. Aside for relying on the money they make at their places of employment, many single parents, because of divorce and separation, also rely on child support from the absent parent as a supplement to their own income; however, often, child support goes unpaid, but with more proactive government supervision, this problem could also be solved.
   A. The importance of child support
   B. Recent situation in Broward County as detailed in Sherman’s essay
   C. What the government should do to remedy back child support

V. Even though there are many steps that federal and local governments could take to alleviate the financial stress that comes with being a single parent, there are also ways that concerned
individuals in the community can help these families.

A. Programs for single mothers
   1. Working Women Technical program (WWT)
   2. Similar programs for fathers that would focus more on “women’s work” and making the transition

B. Programs for children of single parents

VI. Conclusion
Two Many Parents: The Necessity of Single-Parent Assistance

What do Barack Obama, Bill Cosby, Michael Phelps, and Julia Roberts have in common? They were all raised by single parents. Despite the fact that some of our country’s most prominent politicians, sports figures, actors, and actresses grew up in single-parent families and did very well for themselves, there still exists an unfortunate and unfair stigma for children across America who are born into single-parent homes. These children and their parents are often misguidedly labeled as trouble makers and disgraces to society because of the rising high school dropout rates and pregnancies out of wedlock by such children. Many people have the misconception that the reason for these facts and statistics related to single-parent children has to do solely with the fact that these children lack the influence of two parents in their lives. However, through numerous studies, it has been proven that single-parenthood alone is not responsible for the disadvantages faced by children from single-parent homes; rather, these studies show that the low income earned by most single parents is the real cause of high dropout rates and pregnancies out of wedlock for single-parent children. Therefore, it is the responsibility of our government to assure single-parent children the same economic and educational opportunities that two-parent children receive.

Over the past several years, numerous studies have been conducted that seek to discover whether or not the parenting by single parents is the real reason why their children often face disadvantages socially and academically, and almost all of these studies agree that the economics of the family is more of a determining factor than the parenting. In a 2004 study entitled “Daddies, Devotion, and Dollars” conducted by sociologists Gary Painter and David Levine, they agree that “[g]rowing up in a family that lacks a biological father is correlated with a number of poor outcomes for youths” such as “[…] teen childbearing out of wedlock and […] dropping out of high school […] (813; 839). However, they discovered “[…] that lower income explains most of the disadvantages of youths in single-parent homes […]” (813). Another study done in 2010 by Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gann includes similar evidence that money, or lack thereof, is the real root of the problem. They discovered “[o]ne clear explanation of the poorer outcomes of children in fragile families [which] is that fewer resources are available to these families, particularly single-mother families” (89-90). Finally, in a personal interview with Mississippi State University Sociologist Dr. Sarah Brauner-Otto, she agreed that “[s]ome social science research has found that children raised in single-parent homes are more likely to be single-parents themselves and have lower incomes later in life. But, other research has found that most, if not all, of this supposed effect is actually due to other factors such as family income and education.” This is all evidence that the parenting of these single mothers and fathers is not to blame for the negative outcomes of their children, yet they are still being unfairly labeled as bad parents; therefore, it is the responsibility of the government to take control of this situation and offer more assistance to these families.

There are some grants and scholarships available for single parents; however, most of these favor single mothers and are often difficult to obtain because of the numerous forms and steps required to apply; therefore, the government should make it much easier for single parents to apply for aid and should not be biased against single fathers. A simple google search with the terms “aid for single parents” returns hundreds and hundreds of websites that single parents may go to in search of federal aid. However, most of these websites cater to mothers and even have names like singlemotherassistance.net and singlemom.com. After searching
through these sites, one can see that most of the grants listed require the parent to be female to even join the site. This is unfair to single fathers and should be reassessed. Also, most of the grants are given out according to a lottery system. For instance, there is a grant available for 10,000 dollars that is given out several times a year to a lucky candidate that has his or her name drawn from a pool of potentially tens of thousands of single-parent families (“Terms and Conditions” pars. 5–8). This must be a great relief for the winner; however, this does nothing for the families who do not win. This is where the federal government should review this policy and make a change. Perhaps instead of awarding all of that money to one family, the government could break that down into smaller amounts and help several families. Also, the government could assess who is awarded the money by the most prevalent need. This would ensure that families in the direst positions would receive the assistance first.

Another way to assist single-parent families is to raise the minimum wage. Many single parents work in service industry jobs and are paid hourly for their time; however, the current minimum wage ranges from six dollars to eight dollars according to the state one lives in (“State Minimum” table 1). This means that on average, anyone living on minimum wage earns roughly 14,500 dollars a year, which is almost impossible to live on in any city or state in America. In an essay entitled “Nickel and Dimed,” Barbara Ehrenreich discusses this very problem as it relates to single-parent households. She says, “The Economic Policy Institute, a liberal policy institute in Washington, DC, recently reviewed dozens of studies on what constitutes a living wage and came up with a figure of $30,000 a year for a family of three, one parent and two children” (par. 5). She also comments that “[w]ages for blue-collar men, as for blue-collar women or anybody in the lower half of the income spectrum, are still lower now than they were in the 1970s” (par. 1), despite the fact that the cost of living has increased considerably since the 1970’s. Under these deplorable wage earnings coupled with the current spike in the price of gas as well as the presumed spike in food costs that will occur due to the recent flooding of the Mississippi River, single-parent households will likely find it even harder to make ends meet. It is time that the government consider all of its citizens that rely on minimum wage, especially for the sake of single parents and their children who rely on their below poverty earnings to sustain them.

Aside from relying on the money they make at their places of employment, many single parents, because of divorce and separation, also rely on child support from the absent parent as a supplement to their own income; however, often, child support goes unpaid, but with more proactive government supervision, this problem could also be solved. Child support can make a lot of difference in a single father’s or single mother’s life when it comes to taking care of his or her children. The amount of child support paid by an individual depends on his or her wages, and this amount may seem insignificant, but any extra money coming into a single-parent household is often desperately needed. Unfortunately, not all non-custodial parents pay their child support on time or in full, which can put a financial strain on the custodial parent. One county in Florida sought to remedy this crisis by establishing a committee as part of the county government that oversaw cases of unpaid child support and worked to ensure that the money was paid in full and on time every month (Sherman pars. 1–3). However, due to government cutbacks, the committee has had to be disbanded because the county cannot afford to compensate the members any longer. One woman commented, “On my own I could pay my rent, that’s it […] I can’t afford the phone bill, the light bill or [anything] else. It’s not that we are out to gouge anything from anybody—it’s just that we honestly need the help” (qtd. in Sherman par. 13). More committees like this across the country would certainly assist single parents in collecting what rightfully belongs to them; however, this case proves that the current economic situations of the federal government and most state governments do not allow for these types of programs to be supported. Therefore, leaders and officials should make it a priority to reassess where they spend their money in order to ensure that beneficial organizations such as these are not the first to be sacrificed because of the strain that places on single parents and their children.

Even though there are many steps that federal and local governments could take to alleviate the financial stress that comes with being a single parent, there are also ways that concerned individuals in the community can help these families. In their article, “Up From Poverty,” Gloria Pierce and Laura Frazer discuss alternate methods for helping single mothers better their finances. Pierce and Frazer outline
one program called Women Working Technical (WWT), which seeks to teach women how to work in nontraditional female jobs such as carpentry, construction, or mechanics (par. 5). This program is operated by individuals who are committed to helping single women find higher paying jobs and giving them the support and training to be able to excel in such jobs. This is one way that citizens, apart from the government, can do their part to ease the stress of single parents. This particular program could serve as a model for other programs for single fathers as well in which the fathers could learn about more domestic chores and responsibilities to enhance their leadership in the home. Likewise, there are many programs that focus on the children of single parents. One such program is Mentor Kids Kentucky, which matches a child from a single-parent home with an adult in the community committed to spending at least four hours each month with his or her assigned child (pars. 1–15). This type of program not only gives the child another adult to share with and learn from, but it also gives parents the freedom to have some alone time. Adults who sign up to be a part of this program work on a volunteer basis; therefore, this type of program does not cost anything to run. If more programs like these were established across the country, more single parents would receive the benefit of knowing that they are not alone and that their neighbors truly care for them and their children. Both of these programs serve as practical models of what individuals can do in their own communities to assist deserving single-parent families.

Even though single parents do face financial hardships not experienced by most two-income families, they are often mislabeled as poor parents simply because they cannot afford to give their children the same opportunities as their two-parent counterparts. This creates daunting circumstances for the children of single-parent families and often forces them to drop out of high school early and not attend college, causing them to also become low wage earners as adults. However, there are several remedies for this situation. Many of the solutions rely on federal and state governments to be more proactive about assigning federal aid and ensuring that these single-parents are not denied what lawfully belongs to them. Additionally, there are solutions that can begin on the community level through concerned and willing individuals who wish to assist their fellow citizens. If even some of these ideas are implemented, many children of single-parent families will be afforded more educational and extracurricular opportunities that will allow them to stay in school and achieve everything they are capable of accomplishing without the burden of too little money being a factor. Thus, these programs will help to break the negative stereotypes given to single parents and their children, and our country may finally realize that two parents are not always better than one.

Works Cited
Two Steps Back is Two Steps Forward:
The Impact of Goats in Landscape Architecture

When people think of goats, most think of petting zoos or just common farm animals. This, however, is not the case with several groups in the United States. These people have begun to use goats for clearing spaces of land and maintaining other areas. Goats are known for their ability to clear a pasture or area of its grass and other plant life quickly and completely. A few goat owners noticed this and decided to make a profit off of their pets. They have since proven that these animals can be an effective method of landscape management in a variety of ways. As with any “innovation,” many people in the industry believe using goats in landscaping seems regressive and problematic; however, goats are already being used as an excellent resource to the landscape community, and through research and technology, their role can still be improved to make them a more effective and widespread tool.

The first benefit of using goats in landscaping is that they are more cost efficient than equipment and labor. These animals have a four chambered stomach which gives them the ability to eat almost any type of plant, no matter how leafy or woody. “Goats eat many of the most difficult weeds to control, including thistle, kudzu, purple loosestrife, and even poison hemlock,” says Perrie Layton” (12). Some machines and tools that landscapers use can struggle with this, often having parts break if they hit something too hard or thick for their blades to cut. Though goats might take longer to finish the job, people who have witnessed them work do not complain. One person observes, “It’s not like they are making noise or causing problems. It was fun. We would go out there and watch the goats” (qtd. in Mirel 33). Unlike humans and machines, goats do not require an hourly salary or fossil fuels to keep them going. They also eliminate the need to worry about replacing broken parts. When a machine gets broken, the parts needed to replace it can become quite pricey, but goats will not break down. By comparison, a new lawnmower can cost a company a couple hundred dollars, and a goat will cost about the same. However, goats reproduce, so paying the equivalent to two lawnmowers will generate multiple mowers for free. An example of this occurred after British Columbia researcher Annie Booth put eight goats out to pasture around city sewages: “A couple of pregnancies resulted in a ‘free increase in research tools’”(Baker). In another study done in the Appalachian Mountains, a comparison of the prices of goats, sheep, machines, and chemicals was established and the results were notable. Over a three year period, “...goats were estimated at $33...,” sheep cost was $262...,” while cutting costs were $133 and herbicide $593...” (Magadlela et al. 1). These numbers alone show the savings a company might acquire through using goats.

Not only can goats help to lower the cost of clearing land, but they can also help the environment as well. Goats tend to be a much more eco-friendly method of clearing land than the methods used by the average landscape maintenance company. Goats eat through acres of brush without requiring fossil fuels to keep going like a machine does. The only fuel the animals need is food which they receive through the work. Consequently, goats do not produce harmful emissions such as carbon dioxide like machines do; instead, they just produce waste that doubles as fertilizer to the land they work. The author of “Let the Kids Do It” suggests that “…goats even provide free, organic fertilization and mineral-balancing irrigation water in the form of urine” (5). This is a natural alternative to chemical fertilizers that companies would use otherwise. These goats would also alleviate the need to use harsh herbicides to kill off weeds and other plants that are hard to destroy. Many plants and especially weeds do not simply disappear by being mowed; these species can only be destroyed by killing them from the roots which is usually done by using a harsh herbicide. Goats, however, eat the leaves off of plants leaving a stalk and root system. This allows the goats to destroy the plants “because they munch flower heads and leaves but leave the stalk undisturbed, [and] without leaves, the weeds cannot turn sunlight into energy to support the root system, and the roots eventually die” (Leyton 12). By using goats, the harmful herbicides will become obsolete in landscaping and result in a more environmentally friendly approach to this profession.
While preserving the environment, the use of goats will also allow landscaping in places that are
difficult to reach by machines traditionally used. It is hard to get large tractors into some areas such as
hills with steep inclines because they might tip over, but a herd of goats will climb the hill naturally, eating
along the way. This is a safer idea than putting a worker on a tractor and risking the employee getting hurt.
Goats can also fit into tighter spaces tractors cannot possibly reach. An example of this was debated on an
Oregon radio broadcast. When discussing how to best clear an area of land, a property manager named
Amber Glen argued, “Because a creek runs beneath the property, the use of bulldozers and herbicides
raised concerns about erosion and possible contamination of the creek” (qtd. in Weinstein). The company
thus chose to use goats. The animals were able to clear the land in about 30 days even though they were
brought to the sight during a time of the year when they do not perform well. Because of the smaller
footprint of the animals, goats will serve a greater use than large, bulky machines.

While all of these claims for using goats are logical, many people who have yet to see the animals' full
abilities still oppose using them in the landscaping business. The primary complaint is the loss of business
because the goats will encroach on their customers. However, goats will never be used as a maintenance
tool because they cannot stop themselves when eating. People are also worried that goats will provide
reasons for less employment of humans. This claim is problematic because goats will not replace a land
clearing crew which usually consists of one man on a tractor and perhaps a supervisor. Goats will still need
at least one person to keep up with them, and larger herds will require even more people to install fences
to corral them and keep them under control. Another possible problem goats present is their inability to
distinguish plants. A goat will not stop eating because there is a pretty flowering plant that the homeowner
would like to keep. One researcher observes, “[T]hey failed to demonstrate a discerning palette, happily
nibbling down tree saplings as well as weeds” (Baker). Again, this reinforces the idea that goats will not be
used as maintenance tools but rather as simple clearing machines.

Clearly using goats in landscaping may present some problems; however, they are the solution to
many of the problems of the landscaping industry, and using them, or possibly other animals for that
matter, still has room to be expanded upon. While goats have proven to be very efficient in land clearing,
research should be done on other animals as well. Sheep have been experimented with in one study, though
they took almost three years to get the same result the goats were able to accomplish in just one year
(Magedlela et al. 1). Because of this, the use of sheep costs more, but this is a step in the right direction.
It is possible that other animals may be able to get the same result faster than goats, and the only way to
find out is to try them in experiments. By using more animals on the job, landscapers are able to help raise
awareness on their conscious efforts to be more eco-friendly.

It is also possible to create more business opportunities with goats emerging in the landscaping
business. Fences could be designed that are quick and easy to set up in order to keep the goats under
control and to keep them from running off. Other technologies could be researched such as devices to keep
up with how much the goats eat in a certain time period in an attempt to maximize productivity. It may
also be possible to come up with a non-chemical spray that makes the plants seem more desirable to the
goats. These are all possibilities that could be researched in labs and in the field that could help to improve
the goat’s role in helping the world go green.

Because they can eat almost anything plantlike without damage, goats can be very useful in the field
of landscaping. With an iron stomach, they are able to clear large areas quickly costing the companies
they work for much less than a crew and machines. These animals are environmentally friendly compared
to large machines because they do not waste resources like fossil fuels, and they even produce their own
variety of fertilizer. Likewise, they can go places that machines cannot and do much less damage to the
land. While goats are already being put to use by some in the landscape business, there is still room for
improvement and further research. If this research is done, the results might reveal a more proficient
animal for the job while advancing technology and business in landscaping. Though it seems like taking a
step backwards, using goats in landscape architecture is actually a huge step forward.
Works Cited
Name: _____________________________                      Research Topic Exercise

STEP 1: On a computer, create a file named research topic to answer the following questions.

1. Think about the essays and articles you read earlier in the semester and recall any questions these brought to your mind. List three or four questions that interest you.

2. Which question interests you enough to research it?

3. Write a paragraph or two based on what you already know about the question you have chosen. Include why the topic is important.

4. Predict at least three or four ways of answering the question you selected. Write a paragraph describing how each of these approaches answers the question.

5. Did you develop at least three approaches, and does this question still interest you enough to research possible answers? If you have already lost interest or could not find three approaches to answering the question, repeat steps two through five, using a different question.

STEP 2: Once you have a question that meets the criteria stated in step five, access the Internet and grab The Little, Brown Handbook (LBH) to complete the following steps. If you get stumped, consult librarians in the Reference Room of the MSU library, tutors in the Writing Center, or your instructor for assistance.

6. Rewrite your question and the three or four approaches that interest you.
7. Locate at least two articles in professional journals, not general magazines that deal with your question. Access these through databases on the MSU library website. Write bibliographies for the journal articles you find; refer to LBH for proper formatting.

8. Refer to the MSU online catalog and find two books, films, or e-books that deal with your question or an issue within your question. Write bibliographies for these sources; refer to LBH for proper formatting.

9. Find two or more other types of sources that examine your question (examples: government documents, newspapers, internet sites, etc.). Write bibliographies for these sources; refer to LBH for proper formatting.

10. Has this preliminary stage of your research garnered at least six sources? If you could not find sources, you may need to seek assistance from a librarian, the Writing Center, or your instructor, or you may need to repeat steps two through ten with a different question.

11. Beneath each bibliography, write a brief summary of that source, emphasizing how you will use it in the exploratory essay.
Exploratory Exercise

This exercise is designed to help organize the information gathered in response to your exploratory question. At this stage of the pre-writing process, you should have 1) formed a clear question for exploration, 2) researched the question, and 3) read and analyzed the researched sources. The next step in the pre-writing process is to group your researched sources based on the perspective each addresses. By doing this, the focus of your research and ideas will be more organized and beneficial as you begin to write your essay. These perspectives will later become the main points that you develop in the body of the exploratory essay.

NOTE: If you have a fifth perspective, include it with corresponding sources on a separate sheet of paper.

STEP 1:  State the question you plan to explore.

STEP 2: Group each researched source based on the perspective from which it addresses your proposed question. In the process of grouping, you should also attempt to choose an organizational strategy that presents the perspectives in the most logical and effective order. This step will assist with unity in the body of your essay because each perspective will ultimately evolve into distinct topic sentences in your essay. Provide at least 3–5 perspectives.

Perspective 1:

  Source 1:

  Source 2:

  Source 3:

Perspective 2:

  Source 1:

  Source 2:

  Source 3:

Perspective 3:

  Source 1:

  Source 2:

  Source 3:

Perspective 4:

  Source 1:
Source 2:

Source 3:

STEP 3: Closely review each perspective to ensure that all information is grouped appropriately.
CREATING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This assignment is practical since you are asked to begin identifying the sources from library research and from the exploratory research paper that are of particular importance to the argumentative research paper. After receiving approval for your research topic, write an annotated bibliography of your sources (10–15 sources). Follow these directions, or those given by your instructor, for each source:

- Review the annotated bibliographies provided in this text.
- Before the first entry, write your thesis statement.
- Provide a complete MLA bibliography entry for the source. Be sure to consult The Little, Brown Handbook in order to ensure that you use the correct format for each bibliographic entry.
- In your own words, write a summary of the source. If the source is an article, summarize the full article. If the source is a book, summarize only the portion that deals with your restricted topic. Do not quote directly from the selection. If there is a key word or two that must be quoted for the purposes of clarity, then do so, but the summary is primarily in your own voice.
- In addition to the summary, write an evaluation in one or two sentences explaining how useful or persuasive the source is.
- Alphabetize your sources according to the first word in each bibliography, i.e. the last name of the author or first major word of a title (normally excluding prepositions or a, an, and the).

ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

These are areas that need consideration in putting together your argument:

- Introduction: With attention getters (like a good quote, or a hypothetical scenario), general background information about your issue (define/explain what you think your reader might need to know, what controversy is surrounding this issue), and a thesis statement (which is a clear position for one side of the issue.)
- Origins of the issue: When and where did your issue begin? Who or what group brought it to the attention of others? What were the causes of the issue? Take the reader from the starting point to the current debate.
- Why is this an issue? What are some of the consequences that have occurred? Why should anyone care? How are other people affected by it?
- Your first reason to support your position/argument: explain, give examples, analyze.
- Your second reason to support your position/argument: explain, give examples, analyze.
- Your third reason to support your position/argument: explain, give examples, analyze.
- The opposing point of view’s strongest argument—acknowledge, explain their reasons for their beliefs, support them with research. Do not refute, yet—essentially you are setting them up, to tear them down. Transition into your refutation:
- Critique solutions that have been attempted and discuss why they failed.
- Offer a modified or an original solution—can a compromise be reached? What are the steps to resolving this issue?
- Conclusion: Take a look into future—what if the issue is not resolved? What would be the benefits if it were, or perhaps the consequences if it weren’t?
Throughout the research paper, your ideas must structure and direct your argument. Don’t just present information. Don’t merely offer your reader an “information transfer,” that is, just placing (without explanation) information, facts, and quotations from journals, magazines, and books into your research paper. Get in there and argue, analyze your sources, and evaluate their points in the context of your own claim.

You will probably use quoted materials, summaries, and paraphrases of opinion, facts, and other information to develop your argument. Don’t, however, simply throw in a quotation wherever and whenever you like without interpreting that quote; each piece of quoted material should be adequately introduced, examined, and related to your claim in the body of your research paper.

Before submitting your final paper for evaluation, proofread and edit to correct any surface errors, and remember to include all necessary materials in the packet your instructor asks you to submit.

This is what you will need to turn in on the final due date. If any one of these steps, assignments, exercises, drafts is incomplete or missing, the instructor reserves the right to view the ENTIRE research project as incomplete—constituting an “F.” If the topic has not been approved through a formal topic proposal, the research project will not be accepted—essentially all steps in this process must be accomplished PRIOR to turning in the final draft, or no grade will be given on that particular step, and you run the risk of not being eligible for a grade. The final submission should include the following:

1. Topic proposal and approval
2. Pre-Writing and Exercises
3. Annotated Bibliography: minimum of 10-15 sources
4. Outline
5. Instructor critique and/or critique from Writing Center
6. Rough Drafts/Peer Responses
7. Final draft
While listening to your classmate present information on his or her research project, record your answers to the questions below; in addition, to the left of each question, rate your classmate according to how clearly and thoroughly the information was presented. Award points on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = weakest, 5 = strongest).

Presenter: ________________________________

____ / 5 What was the presenter’s initial question?

____ / 5 What prompted this initial question?

____ / 5 What general perspectives (at least 3) did the writer investigate?

____ / 5 After the exploratory essay, on which perspective did the writer focus?

____ / 5 What is the writer’s research argument?

Comments:

Presenter: ________________________________

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Comments:
Presenter: _________________________________

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Comments:

Presenter: _________________________________

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__/ 5  What general perspectives (at least 3) did the writer investigate?

__/ 5  After the exploratory essay, on which perspective did the writer focus?

__/ 5  What is the writer’s research argument?

Comments:

After rating your classmates, reflect on their reaction to your presentation in each of these categories:

__/ 5  How clearly did you state the initial question?
__/ 5  Did you explain clearly how you arrived at the initial question?
__/ 5  How thorough and detailed was your explanation of at least three research perspectives?
__/ 5  How clearly did you explain your narrowing of focus from multiple perspectives to one?
__/ 5  Do your classmates understand your research argument and what your essay will include?
Provide thorough and thoughtful responses to the following questions. Yes and No answers are insufficient, so comment, explain, or offer suggestions for all responses. You may also write on the draft and mark grammar and punctuation mistakes.

1. How does the title grab your interest? In what way does it suggest the essay’s content?

2. After reading the introductory paragraph(s), give a brief overview of the issue. What was the writer’s starting point? What is the writer’s question? From which perspectives (at least three) did the writer research the question?

3. Does the introduction provide enough general background information on the issue?

4. Examine each body paragraph individually: does each one present a single perspective and examine it by providing material from credible sources? Note general comments below, specific ones on the paper.

5. Is each source identified clearly and cited correctly? Mark, but do not correct, errors on the paper.

6. Evaluate the organizational strategy. Is all information related to a single perspective in the same or adjacent paragraphs?
7. Read the concluding paragraph(s): identify the potential answer(s) to the initial question.

8. Based on the conclusion, predict a thesis for the argumentative research essay that will develop from this assignment.

9. Look back through the essay: has the writer handled verb tense appropriately? Mark any verbs that are presented in the wrong tense.

10. Do all quotations have appropriate lead-ins, quotation marks, and parenthetical citations? Are they smoothly incorporated into the text? Is there variety in lead-ins?

11. Are paraphrases and summaries appropriately documented within the text?


13. Does the writer follow MLA format? Consider margins, spacing, headers, and font size.

14. Discuss the strongest and weakest aspects of this essay with the writer.
Provide thorough and thoughtful responses to the following questions. **Yes and No answers are insufficient,** so comment, explain, or offer suggestions for all responses. You may also write on the draft and mark grammar and punctuation mistakes.

1. How does the title grab your interest? In what way does it suggest the essay’s content?

2. After reading the introductory paragraph(s), give a brief overview of the issue. What was the writer’s starting point? What is the writer’s question? From which perspectives (at least three) did the writer research the question?

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