

Writing Assignment title: Defining Terrorism Paper

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Summary: In this writing assignment, students create their own definition of terrorism (based on required reading and their own critical thinking) and then apply that definition to an alleged terrorist group currently at work in the world today. Students have to decide if that group is actually practicing terrorism or not, based on their own definitions.

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to critically analyze academic texts, international news, maps, histories, and their own received ideologies and received wisdom for assumptions, political and cultural points of view, and stated and unstated biases.
2. Students develop a recognition that all acts of representation are always partial—that they are shaped by the questions asked and the perspectives of those creating the representation.
3. Students develop core liberal arts skills: reading unfamiliar information and making sense of it; thinking critically about what they're reading; synthesizing material; coming to a conclusion about it; and articulating that conclusion verbally and in writing.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students read and evaluate primary and secondary sources.
- Students develop and defend their own conclusion about the topic.
- Students must apply their conclusion to a specific, real-world context.

Materials Required: handout (below).

Assignment Activities:

1. Introduce assignment. Have students read the assignment's purpose, steps, and due date.
2. Assign students the Contemporary Global Issues essay on "International Terrorism" from the textbook.
3. Discuss the reading as a class. Ask students what they felt was persuasive about the article, and what (if anything) they felt was left out or unaccounted for.
4. Ask the students to write for a few minutes about what they learned in discussion, what questions they still have, what research they might like to begin on this subject.
5. Discuss how many sources—coming from which media—are considered sufficient for the research quotient of the paper.
6. Optional: discuss selection and assessment of source material (detection of bias, analysis of a source's reliability, etc.).
7. Optional: discuss instructor's preferred citation format in class, or, if none is preferred, discuss places where students can go to get help with general citation questions (online sources, writing center, available guidebooks).

Comments:

Be sure to remind students that they may not write on a U.S. group or organization as their chosen “terrorist” group. The reasoning for this is two-fold: the first reason is that North America is not a region covered by the text. The other is that students may want to choose single individuals or “trench coat Mafia” teenagers, whereas you will want them to focus on international, secular nationalist, or religious organizations overseas.

Plagiarism is a common difficulty with this assignment. It is important to clearly explain standards of academic honesty and the penalties for violating them. One possible solution is Turn-It-In, or some other plagiarism-identifying software. Another solution could be to ask students to turn in copies of the articles they have used as source material, with the sections that they quoted or paraphrased highlighted. These could be handed in with their papers in a folder for the instructor to reference, if necessary.

Defining Terrorism Paper

Devise a definition of the term "terrorism," based on the textbook essay "International Terrorism," other textbook sections (terrorism is also discussed in the chapters on Europe and Middle East), primary and secondary sources, class lectures, and your own research. Explain and defend the criteria used in your definition.

Afterwards, go on-line and research the ideology, aims, and methods of a contemporary organization that has also been labeled as "terrorist" by governments, businesses, or humanitarian/human rights groups. [Note: remember that homegrown US groups/organizations can not be used.] Would this group be labeled as a terrorist organization according to your definition? Why or why not?

General Format: Minimum 5 pages, typed, double spaced, 12 font, Times New Roman script, 1 inch margins. Title page required.

Citations: Endnotes should be used to cite all source information whether quoted directly or paraphrased. Any format is acceptable as long as it is consistent. No footnotes or parenthetical references allowed.