

Research Writing on a Documentary

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking....”

Zora Neale Hurston

Directions: Write a research paper analyzing the methods the director uses to achieve a purpose in a documentary. Use MLA format to credit and document sources.

Suggested Areas for Research

- Director’s credentials and background (www.imdb.com, www.documentaryfilms.net)
- Any existing reviews of the film (ProQuest newspapers and magazines, www.newyorker.com, www.mrqe.com, www.washingtonpost.com, www.newyorktimes.com)
- The subject matter of the documentary and the director’s use of information on the subject (global warming, voting machines, for example)
- Distributor’s web site for the film, if available (www.apowerfulnoise.org, for example)
- Sources cited in the film or listed in the credits, if available
- Books and resources about the documentary as a genre

Making a Claim about the Artist’s Purpose and Methods

Remember that research is a process of inquiry and discovery. You should not formulate your thesis until you have completed your research. Once you have read multiple sources, you may approach the way you summarize and synthesize your findings in a number of different ways.

- Analyze the message of the documentary: Director Almudena Carracedo’s documentary *Made in L.A.* weaves together the stories of three Latina immigrants to show the injustices of the garment industry in California.
- Evaluate the quality of the documentary: *Made in L.A.*, directed by Almudena Carracedo, is a compelling documentary that illustrates the power of individuals to bring people together to right injustices.
- Evaluate the balance or bias of the documentary: In *Made in L.A.*, director Almudena Carracedo presents a view that is sympathetic to immigrants and that demonizes Forever 21 and other manufacturers of inexpensive, trendy clothing.

Synthesizing Sources in Support of a Claim

- Choose the method of development that best lends itself to the argument you are trying to make.
- Blend sources in each body paragraph. Avoid writing a long paragraph from a single source.
- Make conscious choices about when to summarize, paraphrase, or quote your source. Reserve quotations for those statements that are most powerful.
- Document all information from your sources, whether you summarize, paraphrase, or quote your source.
- Consult an MLA style manual to be certain that you have documented each source appropriately and carefully.

Note: Use the rubric as you revise your draft.

Rubric for Research Writing

Score of 5

This response demonstrates consistent mastery, although it may have minor errors. This response

- effectively states and develops a claim, uses an appropriate organizational strategy, and provides effective reasoning and supporting ideas.
- synthesizes multiple, reliable sources in a variety of ways; documents sources consistently and carefully; and uses information ethically and thoughtfully.
- uses effective rhetorical devices and language to create a credible and distinctive voice.
- varies sentence structure skillfully and develops a smooth progression of ideas.
- is generally free of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Score of 4

This response demonstrates adequate mastery with occasional lapses in quality. This response

- states and develops a claim, uses a clear organizational strategy, and provides sound reasoning and supporting ideas.
- synthesizes multiple, reliable sources; documents sources carefully; and uses information ethically.
- uses appropriate rhetorical devices and language to create a credible voice.
- varies sentence structure and develops a smooth progression of ideas.
- may have some errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Score of 3

This response demonstrates partial mastery, but it has one or more flaws. This response

- states and develops a claim, uses an organizational strategy, and provides reasoning and supporting ideas.
- synthesizes some reliable sources, documents sources, and uses information ethically.
- uses some rhetorical devices and language to create a clear voice.
- has some variation in sentence structure and develops a progression of ideas, though inconsistently.
- may contain a number of errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Score of 2

This response demonstrates little mastery and is marred by one or more weaknesses. This response

- has a vague or limited claim, uses no clear organizational strategy, and shows weak thinking and inappropriate or insufficient use of supporting detail.
- synthesizes sources poorly, though there is an attempt at documenting sources and using information ethically.
- uses few or no rhetorical devices and shows little control of language.
- has simplistic sentence structure and poor transition of ideas.
- contains errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that sometimes hamper meaning.

Score of 1

This response demonstrates a lack of mastery and serious flaws. This response

- does not state or develop a claim and provides little thought, organization, or supporting detail.
- has inadequate sources and poor documentation that may suggest unethical use of information.
- has numerous errors in use of language and lacks coherence.
- has serious flaws in sentence structure that hamper meaning.
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that consistently hamper meaning.

Score of 0

- No response or a response that is completely irrelevant will receive a score of zero.