

Spring 2018

First Year Seminar  
**Book Report**

**Description:** You must select a book that you will read about a controversial topic, and write a five page report on this book. Your goal is to evaluate the book on the quality of its evidence, analysis, objectivity, and so on.

The topic of the book and particular book you choose is up to you, but must be approved by me. The topic must be accessible to everyone and debatable.

**Part 1: Choosing a Book**

**Tuesday February 13**

By Tuesday, February 13, you must have chosen which book you will use, or at least have a first choice picked out. **If you buy a book, save the receipt.** On this date, every student will sign up for a 20 minute interview with the professor about the book. This is to discuss whether the book is an appropriate choice or not, and to discuss somewhat what type of information should be included in the paper.

What is a good choice? Almost any topic in pseudoscience is acceptable. Ghosts, UFO's, spontaneous human combustion - any of these are good choices of topics. You can also pick a scientific topic about something that is not as well established, such as the evidence for global warming. But pick a topic that is understandable by the average reader, not something very technical.

Now you must choose a book. You can find books on these topics at any bookstore, or you may find something usable in our library. The book should discuss the evidence for the topic. For example, a book about how to tell your horoscope is unacceptable. In contrast, a book arguing that horoscopes are reliable is acceptable.

**Part 2: Taking Notes, and preparing to write**

**Tuesday, March 22**

By Tuesday, March 22, you should have read the book through at least once and have taken notes on it. These notes should be handed in to the professor in a second interview (I can photocopy them and return them, or you can give me a photocopy). These notes won't be graded; they are just to make sure you are making progress. You should also be prepared to describe what you are going to write. I recommend having an outline prepared, but different people write in different ways, and I don't want to micromanage your writing process.

I want your notes to keep track of what the book says where in a general sense. I want you to particularly keep track of how strong the evidence is, and how well supported the evidence is. In other words, I want you to judge if the author used proper scientific principles in drawing their conclusions.

You must also have found at least two other sources on the same topic. At least one of these other sources must be written material, *not* the internet.

**Part 3: Rough Draft**

**Thursday April 19**

By midnight on April 19 you will have to turn in a rough draft of your paper. Your paper will be a minimum of about 1800 words long (about six double-spaced pages).

Your report should describe the book to someone who hasn't read it, and then the bulk of the paper should evaluate the book on the basis of how well justified the book is in drawing its conclusions. Are there other explanations of the phenomena described in the book? How well does the author support his/her claims? Can you find evidence that the author is distorting or coloring the facts? Note that I do not want you to draw a conclusion about the phenomenon itself, just about whether the author proves his/her case.

**Rough drafts will be graded.** Mostly, they will be graded for content; the clarity of ideas presented, the organization of the paper, and similar matters. I will not focus on spelling, grammar and so on, on the rough draft. They should be written in Word and emailed to me. I will return the rough drafts, with comments, to you as quickly as possible.

**Part 4: Final Draft**

**Tuesday May 1**

You should pay attention to corrections, and then type the final draft. In the final draft, grammar and spelling/word choice errors will count, as well as content and organization.

**Due Dates**

<b>Choose Book</b>	<b>February 13</b>
<b>Read/Notes</b>	<b>March 22</b>
<b>Rough Draft</b>	<b>April 19</b>
<b>Final Draft</b>	<b>May 1</b>