

Writing Assignment: Genetics and Society

The Assignment:

Genetics plays a huge role in our everyday lives. Whether reading a book on science fiction, participating in a pro-life/abortion rights demonstration, or watching the evening news, you can't be an effective consumer or voter in our country without understanding basic genetic principles. In this assignment I am asking you to find a topic with which to explore the intersection between Genetics and our current social context. This is a very broad topic and can range in scope from popular portrayals of the science of genetics to ethical issues that have been raised as a result of advancements in genetic technology (e.g., in the medical arena).

You will write a paper utilizing **at least three sources**, with one of each of the following categories: 1) a mass-market book, 2) a printed news article that dates from September 2010 or later and 3) a reputable website sponsored by a legitimate organization (**No Wikipedia references allowed**). The specific topic is your choice and your paper must center on a thesis that goes *far beyond* mere summary of your sources. You should *critically analyze* the positions taken/points made by the authors (in the context of your thesis), and explain your own position. Be sure to **INCORPORATE** (not just reference artificially) a biblical and Christian worldview. You are welcome to use additional print publications to supplement your discussion.

When choosing web resources, evaluate carefully the reliability of the source (Is it cited by other scientists? Is it published by a specific interest group? Is the group funded by private or public funds?).

If you want to use a different combination of types of sources (as opposed to that listed above), I will consider well-justified proposals but you must check with me first.

Choosing a Topic:

The best topics for you to choose are ones that you are really interested in learning about, so when possible draw from your spheres of influence. Find topics of interest by searching the internet (via Google) using keywords like popular culture and genetics, bioengineering, genetic modification etc. If you are at a loss for ideas, come talk to me. I think you will be surprised at the breadth of topics that you are free to explore.

Required resources may be in the libraries or may be available online. Use our Public Librarians and Public Library resources to perform useful literature searches. Librarians can provide invaluable instruction in database search techniques and provide hints for evaluating sources and their potential biases. You will need to spend a considerable amount of time choosing and narrowing down your topic and making sure that the proposed scope is not too large.

Assignment #1 – Submit Topic Proposal (Due April 29 in class – not email):

Submit a topic proposal. Write a couple of paragraphs explaining your general topic, your thesis and the directions your arguments will go. This assignment is worth 10 marks.

Assignment #2 – Submit Annotated Bibliography (Due May 6 in class – not email):

Submit an annotated bibliography: List your sources, and include a few sentences that explain how that source will contribute to your paper. Your bibliography annotations must be in your own words, of course. This assignment is worth 10 marks. Note, if the reference is available in print form, the hard copy journal should be cited, not the website that you downloaded the paper from. (For example, if you use an article from Scientific American, the reference should not contain a website.) Don't forget to spell-check and use proper grammatical constructions!

Assignment #3 – Submit Paper (Due May 20 in class):

The actual paper should be in the range of 1200-1500 words (~4 pages) and is worth 80 marks. It is possible to fit lots of ideas into a short paper if you craft your writing carefully. Proper citation of sources is your responsibility. Paraphrasing (taking another person's sentences and changing a few words here and there) can be considered plagiarism. Follow rules on plagiarism very carefully! **Please use 1.5 to double spacing, Times Roman 12 point font, 1 inch margins.** Do not write name on the front of the paper, rather, hand print it on the back cover so that I do not become biased while marking! Double-sided print-outs are encouraged to save paper.

Final Score: (Total 100 marks)

Assignment #1 – Topic Proposal due April 29 in class **10 marks max**

Assignment #2 – Annotated Bibliography - due May 6 in class **10 marks max**

I. Writing Style and Grammar: (22 marks)	Maximum Possible Score	Score awarded
1. Were there a notable number of grammatical errors?	5	
2. Were there a notable number of spelling errors?	5	
3. Was the paper easy to read? Did you find yourself having to read and re-read sentences as you proceeded through the paper because you could not understand the author’s meaning?	5	
4. Were supporting papers properly and clearly cited throughout the paper? Does every paper cited have a full reference at the end of the paper? Does every paper listed in the reference list have a citation in the text?	3	
5. Did the references come from reputable sources? Any questionable ones? Is the Reference list properly and consistently formatted and are citations from the text easy to find in the reference list (either alphabetically or numerically by order)?	4	
6. Were there any signs of plagiarism (e.g., are there any notable similarities between the text presented in the paper and materials found in the cited references? Direct quotations are not the norm in scientific writing – if you quote material from a reference source it indicates that you are too lazy to synthesize and analyze it yourself. NOTE: direct quotations are discouraged except for in the case of an interview transcript or a short illustrative statement made by a true leader in the field.		Severe Penalties!

I. Total: 22 marks

II. Organization: (14 marks)

1. Was the content of the paper organized in a way that made sense or was it confusing? Subheadings can be used in scientific papers to serve as guideposts and to keep the reader focused on the topic being developed. Were subheadings used in an effective manner to keep you focused on the flow of the paper? **4**
2. Could you “feel” the flow of the paper as you were reading, or did you have a feeling of not knowing what to expect next? Did the author effectively craft transitions between paragraphs/topics? **6**
3. Did the title make you curious to read more and once you read did you find that the title was well-chosen/justified? **4**

II. Total: 14 marks

III. Strength of Content: (44 marks)

1. Was the thesis of the paper clearly stated in the introductory remarks? **4**
2. Did the paper adequately develop the topic or did you feel like you were reading a list of facts without knowing what you were supposed to get from the facts? **7**
3. Did the author present a well-balanced view of the subject matter with a clear description of the scientific as well as the social aspects of the topic? **7**
4. Was the author accurate in his/her data presentation? Was it scientifically based and was the science correct? **8**
5. Did the author conclude with comments citing the major ethical difficulties involved in the topic and where future effort needs to be made or how these differences might be resolved in the future? **7**
6. Does the author maintain a thoughtful and professional tone that indicates the author is summarizing in an educated fashion the “state of the ethics” on this particular topic. Was this the case or was there ranting and raving? **3**
8. Marker’s Choice (Explain Choice in Specific Comments) **10**
Marker can award all the points if they feel like they have really learned something from the paper and that it was a joy to read or they can subtract from a total of 10 pts in regards to another feature of the paper that was not anticipated in the earlier categories.

III. Total: 44 marks
