

Disciplines: Spotlight & Shadow

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand the role of disciplines in generating knowledge. More importantly, it will help you appreciate the ways your choice of major will shape *your own* thinking, allowing you to see some things more clearly (spotlighting) while putting other insights in shadow.

This assignment has two components: individual and group. Each component is assessed independently. However, your success in the group part will depend crucially on how seriously you take the individual component. If you are earnest about the individual assignment, you will likely also do well on the group part; if you are half-hearted about the individual component, you will almost certainly fail the group component as well.

For this assignment, you will choose – in your groups – a *theme* for the semester. Your task will then be to examine this theme from the perspective of different academic disciplines, with the aim of seeing how each discipline can illuminate the theme, as well as what aspects of the theme each discipline might overlook.

The assignment has five steps:

- In the first week, your group chooses a theme.
- Also in the first week, your group selects four academic disciplines to examine.
- Before engaging with each discipline, each member of the class – individually – must find and read an academic article from within that discipline, on their group’s theme. They must then write a short essay answering some questions about that article (see below).
- During the week each discipline is examined, the group will share their thoughts about the articles based on a set of questions (see below) and produce a group report.
- Each student – individually – must write a final report summarizing their insights from the course as a whole.

1. Choosing a Theme

When choosing a theme, *wide is better than narrow*. Your theme will need to be able to connect to all four disciplines you choose in a meaningful way. If the theme is only relevant to a restricted range of academic disciplines (“quantum field theory,” or “behavioral genetics,” for instance), it probably won’t be a good choice.

At the same time, avoid extremely vague themes (“life,” or “the future,” for instance), as they tend to be too slippery to enable genuine engagement.

In other words, the theme should be broad enough that most academic disciplines have at least something to say about it, but narrow and identifiable enough that you can say something *meaningful* about it.

Most importantly, the theme should be of interest to you, so choose a theme that you are genuinely interested in knowing more about.

The instructor will help you choose a theme in the first week and will need to sign off on any theme that you choose.

2. Choosing the Disciplines

Your theme should ideally be broad enough to connect to a wide range of academic disciplines, but this may not always be the case. When choosing your four disciplines, give some thought to whether they are a good fit for your theme.

3. Individual Assignments

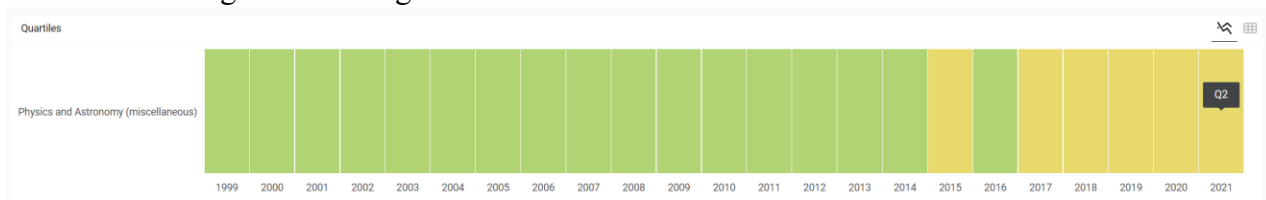
a. Choosing an Article

When choosing an article, there are a few things to bear in mind:

- There are several places you can look for an article. A good starting point is [Google Scholar](#).
- It is *essential* that you choose an article that accurately represents the discipline. This means choosing an article from a journal that is well regarded *within the discipline in question*.

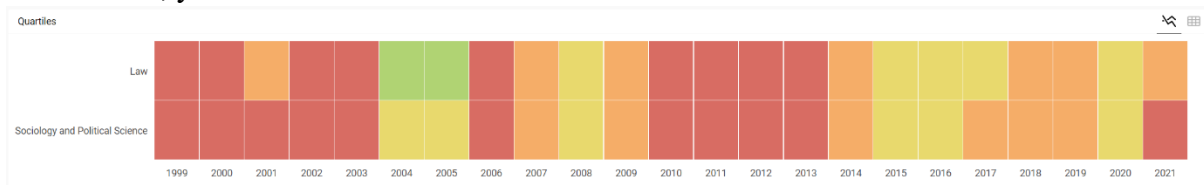
To find this out, you should put the journal title (not the article title) into [Scimago](#).

- If the journal does not appear in Scimago, it is probably not a good journal and you should find a different article.
- If the journal does appear in Scimago, click on the title, then scroll down until you see something like the image below:



- First, check whether the journal is categorized in the appropriate field. The journal in the above image, for instance, is categorized in “Physics and Astronomy.” If your discipline that week is Public Policy, for instance, then the journal your article is from should be categorized in something like “Public Administration.” If the journal is *not* categorized in a field closely related to the discipline you’re supposed to be discussing, you need to find a new article.
- If you hover the cursor of the colored bar for the most recent data available (in the above image, the yellow bar above “2021”), you can see the journal Quartile. Journals that are Q1 (green) or Q2 (yellow) are good. Journals that are Q3 (orange) or Q4 (red) are not. You should only use articles from Q1 or Q2 journals.
- Sometimes journals are categorized in more than one field (see the image below), and the journal is in different Quartiles for the different fields. The journal should be Q1 or Q2 *in*

the discipline that you are discussing. If it's not rated Q1 or Q2 in a field related to the discipline that you're discussing, it doesn't matter how well regarded it is in a different field, you should choose a different article.



- It is better to only use journals that are Q1 or Q2 in the most recent year for which data is available. So even if they were Q1 or Q2 in the past, if they are not Q1 or Q2 *now*, you should find a different article.

b. The Assignment Itself

Your assignment is to write a short essay (250–300 words) about the article, answering the two following questions:

- **What does this article help illuminate** about your group's theme? Give one concrete example from the article.
- **What seems left out, ignored, or distorted** by the way this discipline approaches the theme?

You should spend about half the essay on each of these questions. Unbalanced essays (mostly focusing on one question at the expense of the other) will be graded lower accordingly.

The 250–300-word target is strict. Essays that are under 250 words or over 300 will be graded lower.

The use of AI for this assignment is *severely restricted*. Each assignment should abide by the course's AI Use Policy, *including* by completing an "AI Use Disclosure Statement" at the bottom of each assignment.

These essays are due in advance of the week the discipline is examined.

Each assignment must include:

- The bibliographic details of the article, in the following format:

Author Last Name, Author First Name. Year of Publication. Name of Article. *Name of Journal*, Issue Number: Page Range.

For instance: Santoso, Siti. 2022. A Professional's Guide to Citing Articles. *Journal of Citation Studies*, 22(1): pp. 68–89.

- A screenshot of Scimago, showing that the journal is Q1 or Q2 in a relevant field.
- An AI Use Disclosure Statement (if you did not use AI, you must still include an AI Use Disclosure statement saying so).

4. Group Assignments

In groups, during the week each discipline is examined, each group should complete a worksheet with the following questions:

Discipline of the Week: _____

Theme: _____

1. What kinds of methods or evidence did our articles use?

(Tick all that apply and briefly describe)

Experiments

Surveys/interviews

Ethnographic fieldwork

Observational studies

Data/statistical analysis

Archival research

Literature review

Textual analysis

Theoretical analysis/argument

Logical/mathematical argument

Creative practice/artistic work

Other _____

2. What sorts of questions or problems did they focus on?

3. What assumptions or values seemed to shape how the discipline looked at the theme?

4. What aspects of the theme did this discipline make more visible?

5. What aspects did it leave out or distort?

6. One insight we take from this discipline's perspective on our theme:

7. One thing this discipline can't help us understand about our theme:

This assignment must be completed by hand; any AI use is *strictly prohibited*. Any AI use of *any kind* will lead to a grade of zero for the assignment.

5. Final Report

Each student should write a report of 800–1000 words at the end of the semester.

This essay should be taken as an opportunity to integrate insights from across the entire course, by answering the following questions:

- How did your understanding of your theme change when you looked at it from different academic perspectives?
- Which disciplines helped you see something new or surprising, and what was it?
- Which disciplines felt limited, or left something important out?
- What do you think this shows about how different academic subjects ask questions and try to understand the world?

The essay should address *all four* of these questions, with Q4 being the most essential: the core of the essay.

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