First Writing Assignment: Topic Exploration
MMW 13, Spring 2015

Length: 2-4 pages + Works Cited Page
Due date: Hard copy due in section on Tuesday, April 8, and Wednesday, April 9.
Format: MLA Format, following MMW Program Policy guidelines
Percentage of Final Course Grade: 4%. You must complete all five writing assignments
in order to pass MMW 13.

Your assignment this quarter is to write an 8- to 10-page research paper that makes an
argument on a topic relevant to the period and issues covered in MMW 13. You will be
developing your own research question, and conducting academic research to help you
construct your argument. Writing assignments 1-5 will take you step-by-step through the
paper. If you follow the steps and engage fully in each part of the assignment, you will be
able to write a paper that’s valuable to you. Along the way, you will learn a process that
can help you write any college-level assignment.

The first assignment is to explore two or more possible topics for the paper, using
research material available through UCSD’s libraries and course materials. Find one or
more topics that interest you, explore each topic, and write a record of your process.

Keep the graded copy of this assignment: at the end of the quarter, you are
required to turn in a portfolio containing graded copies of all 5 assignments.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS:
Identify research areas you would like to explore. MMW 13 covers the period
between 1200 and 1750 CE. Your topic must be drawn from this period. Find several
topics that pique your curiosity. Aim for 2 distinctly different topics.

Consult the online list of MMW 13 research areas, read the course syllabus, skim through
the assigned texts, and talk with your TA and professor. Follow any line of investigation
that intrigues you.

The MMW13 research areas listed online are broad and meant to help you get started, but
they must be narrowed down to be useful. Here is a formula that can help you find or
refine a paper topic: Conceptual category from the online list of MMW 13 research areas
+ geographical region + activity/event + person/group/society/culture.

Conduct preliminary research. For this first assignment, only use research
material available through course texts and UCSD’s libraries: books and journal
articles housed in the library, and electronic sources available through the library’s
website.
Start in the Geisel library building, where you will find carts of MMW-13-specific books
next to the MMW Course Reserves (see the list of reserves posted on the MMW 13
website). You should also, of course, look through the books and journals in the stacks as well as the scholarly material that is available online. One excellent resource is the MMW Library Guide, which provides both general research strategies and links to a wide variety of academic sources.

Browse through scholarly books and journal articles for interesting information on your research areas. If you find books that seem particularly useful, check them out of the library; in the case of articles, make photocopies or print them out.

**Record your process.** Keep track of where you look for materials. Take notes about what books, journals, and databases you look at, what search terms you used, what you found, and when and where you found it.

**Record your observations.** Write down observations about the topics you are exploring from the period between 1200 and 1750 CE. Observations can be intriguing facts, descriptions of historical events or phenomena, or scholars’ comments on situations or conditions—anything you find in your research that raises questions for you or strikes you as noteworthy. Record your observations, as follows:

- Whenever you read something that interests you, write it down.
- Record the source’s author, title, and publication information, and the number of the page on which you found the information.
- Photocopy each source and its title page/publication information, label the photocopy with the source’s author and title, and highlight the place where the information is located.
- Paper clip (don’t staple) your photocopies.

**Identify two or more topics to explore.** Use your observations to come up with at least two potential research topics. Organize your observations by topic.

**THE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT:**
Following the template at the end of this assignment sheet, type up a list of the observations you have made, organized by topic. You must have at least two topics, with at least one observation for each of those topics. You are welcome, however, to record as many observations on as many topics as you wish; the more observations you have for each topic, and the wider the range of sources you consult, the better.

**Provide a citation for each observation.** Follow each observation with an MLA-format in-text citation of the source.

**Comment on the observations in your own words.** After each observation (or group of related observations), write one or two sentences that explain what you find interesting about the observation. What do you think about the observation? What makes it noteworthy? Intriguing? Does it raise an issue or point out a conflict that you may want
to explore further? The commentary should be primarily written in your own words, but if you do use any sources in the commentary, you must quote and cite them appropriately using MLA format.

**Compile a Works Cited page.** List all your sources in correct MLA format.

**SUBMISSION CHECKLIST:**

- List of at least 2 observations from library sources and your comments on the observations, with all sources cited and quoted appropriately in MLA format, following the template provided
- Works Cited page in MLA format
- Photocopies, each labeled with the source's author and title, and arranged in the same order in which they are cited in the text of the paper. Clip them together, but do not staple them to your written assignment. (It's better not to staple the photocopies together, because you might want to reuse some of them for subsequent assignments.)
- Print out of Rubric for Assignment 1
- Folder with Assignment 1

**TEMPLATE for Writing Assignment 1:** [Please follow the MMW Program Policies handout for formatting the heading and page numbers.]

**Topic 1: Role of Cuisine in Monarchy in China** [sample topic]

**Observation 1, Author, Source Title:** [“quotation” or paraphrase of source + historical context (MLA in-text citation)]

*Commentary:* [your comments about the observation]

**Observation 2, Author, Source Title:** [“quotation” or paraphrase of source + historical context (MLA in-text citation)]

*Commentary:* [your comments about the observation]

**Topic 2: Gender Imagery in Sufi Literature** [sample topic]

**Observation 1, Author, Source Title:** [“quotation” or paraphrase of source + historical context (MLA in-text citation)]

*Commentary:* [your comments about the observation]
Works Cited [separate page]

[List of Citations in MLA format]

[updated 2/10/15]