“Significance” Exercise & Worksheet

MMW requires that you explain the significance of your argument in your final paper. We define the “significance” of your argument as “the reason for writing this paper,” or, more specifically, “how your particular argument modifies or contributes to current thinking on the topic.” (Note that we are asking you to determine the significance of your argument to a better understanding of your topic, not the significance of your overall topic).

In order to find out what you are contributing to the academic debate, decide which one of the following approaches applies to your question and argument (everyone should be able to find one approach that (at least somewhat) resembles your own).

For your homework assignment, for PART 1, Re-type the approach and fill in and include the information appropriate to your topic (you may need to modify the wording to fit your particular situation). Then answer the questions for PART 2.

PART 1 – Types of Research Approaches

1. Omission/Gap
   Regarding the question _____________________, I have observed that current scholarship on the issue of __________ (particular issue you are asking about) is lacking, flawed, or incomplete in the sense that _________________. While [scholar’s name] ________ argues that ____________, and [scholar’s name] ________ argues that _____________, they have both failed to recognize that _________________. I think filling in this omission is important because ________________, and if, as scholars, we don’t fill this omission we risk ________________, thus I will argue that _____________.

2. New Outlook
   Regarding the question of ______________, I have noticed that while some scholars argue ________________, and other scholars argue that ________________, no scholars (as far as my own research has determined) have argued that ________________. I want to provide this new outlook on the question because I think it is important to explore/show that ________________. By failing to show _____________, scholarship on this issue is lacking or problematic because _________________.

3. New Combination Approach
   Many scholars have attempted to answer the question of ______________, but in this paper I plan to combine pieces of different scholars’ arguments in a new way. In my approach to the question, I am combining [scholar’s name] ________’s theory about ______________ with [scholar’s name] ________’s theory about ______________. From my research, it appears that the particular combination of theories that I have put together have not been argued before, which is unfortunate because my thesis makes an important contribution to the debate because it _________________.

4. Dispels Assumption or Corrects False Info Approach
   Regarding the topic of ______________, it seems that both [scholar’s name] ________ and [scholar’s name] ________ are both assuming ______________ to be true. However, I think this is a problematic assumption because _________________, and observe that the implications of continuing to assume ______________ is problematic because ________________. Thus, I want to ask a question about the assumption these scholars are making by asking the following: ________________ [you can take this same approach but instead make it so that your argument disagrees with information or historical “facts”].
5. **Hybrid Degree Approach**
   Many scholars have attempted to answer the question ______________, but in my research I have noticed that scholars’ approaches to this topic are somewhat polarized. While some scholars argue that the answer to the question is ______________, other scholars argue that the answer is ______________. My research suggests that both of these answers are correct, though one of these answers is slightly more influential/plausible/etc/ than the other. Thus, I am adding to the scholarly debate by combining two sides of the scholarly debate, showing that both sides are plausible, and showing that one side is more significant/influential/etc. than the other. This is important to do because __________.

**PART 2: Summarize and Explain**

1. What is the approach of your question? Are you asking and trying to make an argument about an omission in scholarly research? A new outlook? Expanding on already existing scholarly arguments?, etc. (See above for “Types of Research Approaches”).

2. Why is your question important to ask? And what are the costs or implications or not knowing or misunderstanding your question?

3. How does understanding your particular question help us understand more about the problem, culture, conflict, or phenomenon that you are investigating?

4. Why is your particular argument (your answer to the research question) important? That is, what are you contributing to the academic debate with your thesis?

**NOTE** - It usually makes sense to allude to the significance portion of your paper in the introduction of your essay (and throughout your paper). This is because the significance portion is your reason for writing the entire paper. In your final paper you may want to put PART I in your introduction and PART II in your conclusion.

*This exercise was developed by MMW TA Allison Winston (2007-08)*