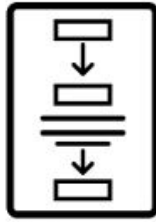# PROJECT 2: WHITE PAPER

A white paper, or backgrounder, is an informative research report that provides background information related to a focused topic. Unlike an argumentative paper, the goal of a white paper is not to compel action or present a conclusion; instead, it is meant to provide contextual information necessary for an unfamiliar audience to understand the topic or issue at hand so that they might later make an informed decision.

Even though the purpose is to inform, a white paper is still *highly rhetorical*. Because the information presented has been chosen specifically for the intended audience it cannot be considered "neutral" even though it may not explicitly make an argument. Typically a white paper is immediately followed by a recommendation report or—for our purposes—an action plan, which assumes the reader is already familiar with the information in the white paper. The white paper establishes the groundwork and puts the audience in the right frame of mind to then be presented with a more argumentative report.

All that being said the white paper you will write will be inherently different because this assignment has been constructed around our theme of crowdfunding. Rather than presenting your research to a manager or supervisor, your primary audience is essentially your team (and me!) and the incentive to thoroughly research both your topic and the process of crowdfunding more generally comes down to how badly you want to achieve your funding goals. Imagine your team is an enterprising start-up, a collective of eager entrepreneurs, or a non-profit looking to make an impact—to get your foot in the door and impress potential investors you really need to know your stuff. That's where research comes in. The goal of this assignment is for you to **practice your research skills**, **hone your writing abilities**, and **gain more experience with document design** all while navigating the complexities of collaboration. Though I will provide some specific instructions, in large part you and your group must decide what to include, how to format the document, and how to divide up the work evenly. Because research is an important part of this project, each group member will be required to conduct research on an aspect of the larger project that interests them. A detailed explanation of the research process,

logistics of collaboration, and breakdown of work will be submitted as part of a Project Plan during the first few weeks of the project.

Though this is a collaborative project, at the beginning of the unit each student in the class will do an initial round of research and pitch their own idea for a crowdfunding project to the entire class. Once everyone has heard all of the ideas the class will vote on five or six projects that they think should be developed further—these will then become the projects for Unit 2 with spots for 4 or 5 team members. The students who proposed the selected projects will become project managers for the rest of Unit 2 and 3. Everyone else will produce a new draft of their resume and a cover letter that showcases the interests and talents they can offer the project. Each team lead will then select their team from the larger pool of candidates.

Once the teams have been determined groups will begin the research process, which will vary widely depending on the kind of project your team is pursuing. For example, if you are seeking funds to design a new app you will need to collect information about app design in general, about the specific type of app you want to concentrate on, about other related crowdfunding projects, and about the practices of crowdfunding. No one ever starts a Kickstarter without first collecting a wealth of background information that guides their process and reassures them that Kickstarter is, in fact, their best choice. Every person in the group will create their own backgrounder document dealing with a different aspect of the project and the documents will be compiled together into a group document.

A final note about the larger project: this is the first part of a two-part project that will conclude in Unit 3. The purpose of both of these projects is to have a viable plan for a crowdfunding project by the end of the semester—I say *viable* rather than *actual* because there is no expectation for you to actually submit your materials to a crowdfunding platform. While I sincerely hope that some groups will have a great idea that they choose to pursue further, realize that these campaigns require more time and effort than we can put in during a single semester. Think of both projects as the steps leading up to launching a real campaign.

TASKS AND POINTS BREAKDOWN

PROPOSAL PRESENTATION (30 POINTS)

Due to the collaborative nature of this project everyone will have an opportunity to pitch an idea for a crowdfunding project but only five will be selected as the subject of the backgrounders. Each person in the class will have 90 seconds to introduce a multimedia *artifact* that presents their idea for a crowdfunding project. For this presentation you are introducing the artifact that contains your pitch. By artifact I mean something people can access digitally once class is over—a short Power Point or Prezi, a video or podcast, a poster, or something else entirely. There are only two conditions: first, you must be able to upload it to a Google Drive folder where it can be accessed by the whole class; and second, it must be short but detailed—be specific about your plan, but keep your artifact simple. In your artifact you must provide a quick overview of your idea, explain why it is both feasible and necessary, and offer any additional information that will convince your peers that this project is worth their time. I will grade on three primary criteria: (1) professionalism, (2) feasibility of the idea, and (3) creativity. Keep in mind that the idea you propose and what actually makes it to the white paper will be necessarily different. You will then have until the following Thursday morning to view the materials and vote on an online form.

REVISED RESUME AND COVER LETTER (20 POINTS)

After the proposal presentations, everyone will redraft their resume and cover letter from Unit 1 and bring them to the next class, during which time we will be holding open interviews for the Unit 2 project. Based on your revised documents and your performance in interviews, you will be placed with a specific team for the rest of the semester. All project managers will meet with me and we will draft teams together to ensure that all teams are fairly balanced in terms of skills (it does not, for instance, make sense for all of the students who are proficient with web design to be in the same group; we're going to spread the love around a bit so each team has access to people with the expertise necessary to complete Unit 2 and 3 deliverables). Project managers are exempt from this portion of the assignment, but will instead be tasked with coming up with a series of interview questions and criteria that they will seek out when recruiting team members.

GROUP CHECK INS (20 POINTS)

Over the course of the unit each group will check in with me three times. For each check-in I will expect both a group update (including a schedule of meeting times and a discussion of collaboration methods) and an individual update; this means each person should be able to tell me exactly how they are contributing to the overall project. Group and individual updates can be lumped into a single document. During the check-ins I will offer suggestions, help resolve any problems or conflicts, and ensure that each group is staying on top of deadlines and due dates. These check-ins can be done in person during office hours (or other scheduled time) or via formal memo.

Adapted from T. Bushner 2016

WHITE PAPERS (150 POINTS)

Details for each of the separate components of the white papers will be released closer to the deadline. Below is the breakdown of points for each separate component of the white papers:

Outline and Project Plan for white papers (20 points)
First draft of your white papers completed and submitted on time (30 points)
Revised final draft of your white papers with sources (100 points)

PEER EVALUATION FORMS (30 POINTS)

For the final part of this unit each individual team member will fill out a Peer Evaluation Form providing a score and comments for each member of their team. The point of the evaluation is to ensure full participation among all group members; as such, the evaluations will be anonymous in order to promote honest responses.

TOTAL: 250 pts

All icons courtesy of The Noun Project

Adapted from T. Bushner 2016