Purpose:
This assignment is your chance to convince me that the program you’ve chosen is worthy of academic attention, not just ratings or blog gossip.

Think of this assignment as the answer to several questions that you should have about your selected program, broken into two main areas: background and history. In essence, this paper is the beginning of a literature review. What is there to say about this program? What have others had to say about it? Why do you see a need to conduct research on it?

This assignment also serves as my first opportunity to evaluate your writing. As such, you should take care to do your best. Content and ideas matter most, but I cannot reward brilliant content if I cannot find it, thanks to multiple mechanical errors and ineffective style.

Content:
Background: Imagine that you have to describe the program to someone who has never seen it, and does not watch much television. When/Where did/does the program air? Who are the major actors/producers/writers? What is the basic story/plot? Do not limit yourself to the questions asked here; include any information that your uninformed conversation partner might need to help her/him understand the background of your program.

History: If the background section includes the program specifics, the history section should include the conceptual and critical specifics. Has this program received critical (popular or academic) attention? Have any controversies surrounded the show?

Put together, these two segments should form the eventual introduction to your critical analysis paper. Answer this question: why should we CARE about this show?

Your paper should show that you understand what makes a program appropriate for critical analysis. You are encouraged to apply the terminology and concepts covered thus far in lectures and your readings.

If you have fewer than five references (8 – 10 for graduate students), you probably need to do more research. Your research can come from academic and popular sources, but must not be ALL popular. Please aim to find and use the BEST sources (not just the first sources you can find).

Details:
- Page limit: 5 – 6 pages, double spaced
- Margins: Microsoft Word default of 1.25” left and right, 1” top and bottom
- Submission: Hard copy or email is fine

Helpful hints:
- Avoid contractions (isn’t, don’t, I’m, you’re)
- Avoid non-specific terms as nouns (it, this, thing, that)
- Avoid casual language when possible (use children instead of kids)
- Spell out acronyms the first time you use them (NBC = National Broadcasting Company)
Communication Studies 169: Television Criticism

Background and History Paper – Assignment Sheet and Grading Rubric

Helpful hints, continued:
- Don’t worry too much just yet about specific episodes…discuss the program as a whole.
- Italicize the names of shows (*Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*)
- The word *media* is plural. The singular form of media is *medium*. Adjust your linking verbs appropriately.

Grading Rubric:
A paper in the “A” range is well-focused, sophisticated and clear. The author demonstrates her/his mastery of the concepts covered in class and in the readings, but this demonstration is subtle, not blatant. The author uses active voice more often than passive voice and needless words or phrases are absent. The paper has very few, if any, mechanical errors, and none that obscure meaning in any way. The selected text is perfect in scope and nature; the author makes clear that she/he has not only given great thought to this selection process, but she/he has also done considerable research on this text’s background, history, and potential audience.

A paper in the “B” range is well-focused and clear, but lacks some sophistication. The author demonstrates her/his understanding of the concepts covered in class and in the readings, but the demonstration is either limited or haphazard. The author uses equal amounts of active voice and passive voice and some unnecessary words or phrases. The paper has very few mechanical errors, and none that obscure meaning in any way. The selected text is appropriate in scope and nature; the author makes clear that she/he has not only given some thought to this selection process, and she/he has also done some research on this text’s background, history, and potential audience.

A paper in the “C” range is somewhat clear, but lacks focused direction. The author includes limited discussion of the concepts covered in class and in the readings. The author uses more passive voice than active voice and includes several instances of unnecessary words or phrases. The paper has few mechanical errors, but some obscure meaning. The selected text is adequate in some aspects, but inappropriate in others. The author appears to have given little thought to this selection process, and includes little written development on this text’s background, history, or potential audience.

A paper in the “D” range is unclear and unfocused. The author fails to demonstrate her/his understanding of the concepts covered in class and in the readings. The paper has several mechanical errors, many of which obscure meaning. The selected text is inadequate and inappropriate in many aspects. The author appears to have given no thought to this selection process, or the text’s background, history, or potential audience.

A failing paper exhibits extreme or frequent “D” type characteristics.

The only way to receive no credit on this assignment is to not submit a paper.