**Paper Guidelines**

**Please note that the information on the first page applies to every paper topic.**

Here are a few thoughts to help guide your thinking:

1. Not all shows—especially today, with the rise of cable TV—illustrate the feelings and attitudes of the entire country. #1 hit shows like *The Cosby Show* or *I Love Lucy* probably do, but many shows primarily speak to the mindset of a specific audience. *South Park*, for example, illustrates the feelings and attitudes of younger Americans, while *Sex and the City* undoubtedly attracts a predominantly female audience. Anyhow, you might want to consider the program’s audience in your analysis.
2. Nearly all shows will, in some way, reflect or comment on the race relations/racial politics of their time. Even the absence of minority characters (commonplace for most shows of the 1950s and 1960s) makes an important statement.
3. Similarly, nearly all shows will reflect the gender issues of their day. There may be “separate spheres” women, or “equal” women, or women who are comfortable with their sexuality, or women whose sexuality is being exploited, or women who want a family, or women who don’t. Most shows will have several different “types” of women—married/single, sexy/plain, white/non-white, professional/homemaker, smart/ditzy, etc. Homosexuality is another gender-related question, and many shows (particularly since the 1970s) will have thoughts on that issue, one way or another.
4. Most shows talk about the political issues of their era—maybe the Cold War, the Republicans/Democrats, the policies of the president, the Vietnam War, the war on terror, drug use/abuse, immigration, and many others. Sometimes, political issues are so controversial that they have to be addressed indirectly. As such, keep an eye out for the use of allegory and metaphor, as with *The Wizard of Oz*.
5. Religion is another issue that is hard for a show to avoid—whether the portrayal is positive, or negative, or a mix of both. As with many subjects, the absence of religion/religious characters sometimes says as much as the presence of religion/religious characters.
6. You can also pay attention to language, and the kinds of things the characters can and cannot say. Some things that were ok in the 1950s are not ok today. Some things that are ok today would not have been ok in the 1950s.
7. It is fine—excellent, in fact—for you to recognize/acknowledge that a show embodies several different viewpoints on the same issue/subject. For example, there may be a character that represents “older Americans” and their viewpoints, and there may be a character that represents “younger Americans” and their viewpoints. Or men/women, religious/non-religious, urban/rural, gay/straight, conservative/liberal, etc.
8. Finally, it’s fine to use “backstage” information—like, for example, if you know that a scene was cut from a show for some reason, or you know that there was a protest directed against the show, or you know that an actor/actress was fired for saying something offensive to his/her colleagues. Just make sure that information is connected to your analysis.

Here are a few things to watch out for:

1. Do not write a review of the show. Whether you liked the show or not is not relevant for this paper. I am asking you to think like a student of history, not a TV critic.
2. Do not forget the EVIDENCE. If your paper does not make frequent reference to **specific** plots, characters, and quotes from the show, it will not be successful.
3. Do not organize your paper by episode (i.e. “In the first episode I watched, I saw this…In the second episode, I saw this…). Doing it that way will cause you to repeat yourself. Instead, you should organize by theme/subject (i.e. “One thing that is clear from watching this show is that Americans in the 1960s were deeply divided by the Vietnam War.”)
4. Avoid topic sentences like this one: “One thing the show talks about is sex.” That is not helpful, because it does not do anything to make clear what the show is SAYING about sex. Instead, the sentence should be something like this, “One thing the show makes clear is that, by the 1990s, Americans had embraced much more liberal attitudes about sex.”
5. Keep in mind that when a show is set in the past, it is NOT teaching us about that past era. It’s telling us about the way in which the people who produced the show UNDERSTOOD that era. *Happy Days*, for example, is not a show that teaches us about the 1950s (when it is set), it is a show that teaches us about the 1970s (when it was produced). The same is true for *M\*A\*S\*H* (1950s/1970s), *Mad Men* (1960s/2010s), *That 70’s Show* (1970s/2000s), and *The Wonder Years* (1960s/1990s), among others. Note that the choices that people make, as they look backward, tend to be very revealing. For example, a major theme of *That 70s Show* is how much casual, unprotected sex everyone was having. That choice indirectly—but still pretty clearly—reflects something about the 2000s, namely that lots of casual, unprotected sex is no longer commonplace/socially acceptable, due to AIDS and other risks that accompany that behavior.

Sample of a good body paragraph:

An examination of M\*A\*S\*H allows us to see that the feminist movement—a movement that advocated equality and respect for women—had made a great deal of progress by the 1970s, and even more progress by the 1980s. The show’s pilot episode, aired in 1972, introduced the character of Major Margaret Houlihan as the head nurse at the Korean War-era hospital. Such a portrayal—a high-ranking female officer—would presumably have been unthinkable in the 1950s. With that said, Houlihan is compelled to endure boorish, sexist behavior from the hospital’s surgeons in the show’s early seasons: sexual passes, catcalls, rebellion against her authority, and even the insulting nickname “Hot Lips.” By the end of the series, however, Margaret would have her revenge, as it were, as such sexist behavior had become socially unacceptable in American society by the 1980s. This is made clear in the 1981 episode “Inga,” when surgeon Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce is dismissive of the skills of visiting a female surgeon named Inga, seeing only her physical attractiveness. He is called out on his sexism, as Margaret says to him:

You think a woman is dead until she lives for you. Well, let me tell you something, Benjamin Franklin, we actually survive without you. We live, we breathe, we dream, we do our work, we earn our pay, sometimes we even have our little failures, and then we pull ourselves together all without benefit of you…

By the end of the episode, Hawkeye concludes that he was indeed in the wrong, and finds himself apologizing to both Inga and Margaret for his actions.