

## “So what?”

*Length:* 1,800–2,000 words

*Form:* Artist Book

The primary objective for this assignment is for you to demonstrate the stakes of scientific research. Why bother with Galileo’s drawings of the Moon? What role do they play in how human beings think about the universe? How does Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection influence our understanding of who we are and where we came from? Why should we take the time to learn about it?

I want to root your research in one of the following time periods:

1. Pre-Galileo
2. Pre-Enlightenment
3. Pre-Darwin
4. Pre-atomic bomb
5. Post-atomic bomb

Your challenge here is to adapt Steven Johnson’s research methodology in “Cold” and explore the influence of a scientific development—a theory, a technological innovation, an experimental method, whatever. You do not have to copy Johnson exactly, however. All roads lead to Rome. You can follow any number of paths, as long as they take you to the same place. Some ideas:

1. You can write as if you lived *before* a specific scientific development—before Copernican heliocentrism, for instance. If you lived at such a time, would you dare question the prevailing theory of geocentrism, even if you had your doubts?
2. You can track the forward momentum of a scientific development. For example, because X was discovered, Y could be discovered, etc. This is very much in the style of Johnson.
3. You can imagine life—life now, life at some point in the past, or life in the future—if some scientific development hadn’t occurred. What if Newton (or Leibniz) hadn’t discovered calculus?

All these approaches, and any combination thereof, will enable you to demonstrate the significance of scientific research—for good or ill.

You will complete a ten-item annotated bibliography for this project, and you will present your research and writing as an artist book. (We will look at some artist books in Special Collections.) In the weeks leading up to this assignment, you will have used verbal and visual forms of communication. Artist books add a third form: haptic—i.e., communication via touch. You therefore have a lot of room for creativity. The one thing I do not want is a run-of-the-mill five-paragraph essay with a thesis statement crammed into an arid introduction.

The genre you write in is also up to you. Remember that many but not all genres require in-text citations. If you choose to write in a genre that does, you may use any citation style you want—APA, MLA, Chicago, CSE—as long as you’re consistent. In any case, on Gallery Day, you will set your annotated bibliography on the table beside your “So what?” project, proving to your audience that you did indeed do your research, and quite a bit of it.

Fascinating!