For your second paper I’d like you to write an argumentative essay – which is just a fancy way of saying, I guess, an organized piece of writing that makes an claim, stakes out an arguable position, and then supports that position enough to convince somebody else to believe it. You will note that this is essentially what all expository writing does – tries to get somebody to believe something you believe. Legal briefs do it, in fact, and so the kinds of things you did in the first paper – presenting facts, trying to sort the crucial questions from the less crucial ones, analyzing implications – you’ll be doing here. The only real difference is that in a legal brief you lead with the facts and then develop your thinking about them, while in an essay you try to lead with your point and then bring in the facts in to help you make us believe it.

So, obviously, capital punishment will be the theme here. But you can approach your writing in a number of ways. Here are some to consider, but not to feel limited by:

• Write a piece in which you stake out a position on the death penalty and support that position. Note that I didn’t say “for or against” the death penalty, although those are clearly two positions you could take. You could also try to stake out some middle ground, and give your reasoning for it. But no matter what you do, in order to make a good, convincing argument, you will need to 1) support your position with facts and expert opinion (use cases and Debating the Death Penalty to find both), and 2) consider legitimate counterarguments to your position. You don’t need to agree with everybody: but ultimately it’s both unfair and unconvincing to act as if people who disagree with you don’t have an argument. Meet those arguments honestly, and show us why we should not agree with it.

• Write a piece in which you do an in-depth analysis of a single capital case. You can consider any of the cases we’ve read about, or you can look at some of the other landmark cases I’ve posted on Nook. If you go this route, try to show us what important issues were considered in the case, what court(s) have done with those issues, and lead us to an understanding of the implications of the case for future law.

• Write a piece in which you examine In Cold Blood. What picture does Capote’s book draw of the Clutter murders and their aftermath? Does the book have an argument, or a stance on capital punishment? If so, what is that stance? And how does Capote
succeed (or not succeed) in persuading you to share it?

There are other ways to go here, but those will get you started. As always, treat the assignment prompts as *starting points*, not as instructions. Take them where you think they should go. And if you want to change them, a little or a lot, or if you want to write about something else, feel free – just let me know in advance.

Otherwise, try for true. That’s a good thing to aim for.