FYW Placement Exam
AY 2017-18
Discussion Questions

“Google, Democracy, and the Truth about Internet Search”
by Carole Cadwalladr
Sunday, December 4, 2016
The Guardian

1. Have you had an experience while using Google or another search engine similar to the one the author recounts in the beginning of the article? If so, how did you respond? In general, how do you use the search function on these sites, and how do you analyze/choose the results?

2. Think about Google’s stated mission, to “organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” (qtd. in Cadwalladr 1) in relation to how you use the search engine. Do your practices and this purpose match? Does your experience on Google match this mission? If so, how? If not, why not? Is it Google’s fault or our own?

3. Do you think the order in which search results are presented influences people? How or why not? Think about your own processes when running searches and responding to information on these platforms. How do you work through results, both physically and intellectually?

4. What do you think is the responsibility of platforms like Google and Facebook? Should they (and other platforms that use algorithms) regulate what information is featured? Should they editorialize their platform results? Should they make their algorithmic process transparent? Is doing so a violation or a practice of free speech? Do we want to give Google or Facebook this responsibility/power?

5. Danny Sullivan, founding editor of SearchEngineLand.com, thinks “Google is doing a horrible, horrible job of delivering answers . . . It can and should do better” (qtd. in Cadwalladr 2). What do you think? Are you satisfied with Google’s response that, “Our search results are a reflection of the content across the web. This means that sometimes unpleasant portrayals of sensitive subject matter online can affect what search results appear for a given query. These results don’t reflect Google’s own opinions or beliefs – as a company, we strongly value a diversity of perspectives, ideas and cultures” (Cadwalladr 3) or do you think Google should do better?

6. How do you feel about companies like Google and Facebook tracking your Internet activity in order to better target-market products, ideas, and candidates to you? Is this just smart business and their prerogative or is it an invasion of your privacy?