

RESEARCH STAGE 1: Introduction to Researching as an Academic

Goal: Selecting a Topic and Engaging in Preliminary Research

Assignments: Blog Posting (posted on BB with due dates)

Potential Issue Presentation (posted on BB with due dates)

THE NATURE OF INQUIRY BASED RESEARCH

Doing inquiry-based research is more art than skill. Every time we engage in research we learn as much about how to practice that art as we do about the subject we are researching. When researching we need to be persistent and flexible for when we hit dead ends. We need to be self-aware of what we are doing so to evaluate our own processes. We need to be critical readers so to discover new research paths and research questions. And we need to be curious, recognizing there will always be questions to be answered.

Of course we need to know the tools available to researchers but we also need to understand the theoretical underpinning of what research is. Here are some key points to keep in mind about researching.

It is a method of Inquiry, in that it is

- Problem Oriented
- Question Driven
- Is a search multi-vocal conversations

It is a recursive process, it progresses and regresses in that it

- Emerges in Stages (a non-linear process that loops)
- Incorporates writing in all stages – note-taking commentary, inner-directed and outer-directed writing

It is fallible, in that it is

- Driven by Personal Interest
- Individualistic or Interpretative
- Is affected by the methodology
- Is affected by other tangible factors—i.e., time, access, understanding
- Must come to an end, but the end is more than end of a conversation, not the conclusive last word.

It is ethical in that it

- Is both personal and public
- Has ramifications on other people's lives

WORKING WITH OPEN TOPICS

Selecting a Topic and Engaging in Preliminary Research

Many students find open topic assignment challenging and they have a difficult time deciding what to write about. For some students there are just too many potential issues to choose from. For others they don't know where to start to even find a issue.

Open topic assignments are also challenging because some topics aren't really dynamic enough to provide multiple as well as complex and sophisticated arguments. And then there is the issue of sufficient research—a topic might be so local or limited, that there just isn't much information available about it.

On the other hand, topics might be so complex, with so much existing information that it would takes weeks, or even months of research for a student to really understand it and to competently produce their own arguments.

First, what does it mean to disagree about an issue? You can always find someone who will disagree about almost anything. What you will be looking for is where there is a significant majority of people for whom the issue is in flux.

An example of what might no longer be a debatable issues is whether we should text and drive. For the most part, texting and driving is prohibited in most states and while people may still engage in texting and driving, it is pretty difficult to disagree about whether it is something we should be doing.

The following information can help guide you through the process of finding, evaluating, and selecting potential issues.

Finding Topics/Issues (PreResearch):

Beginning inquiry with personal reflection

This approach is based on what you think, know, and care about. This can be considered as a part of focused free-writing activity.

- What were the last few significant/serious issues you found yourself questioning or debating or others? What complex issues do you find you, your friends, and family discussing, debating or even complaining about, but seem unable to resolve?
- What do you care about that has larger social implications?
- What local, national, international, universal problems do you feel strongly about? What recent current events have captured your attention?
- Looking around your world, what types of injustice, unfairness, illogic, and misconceptions do you see affecting people? What might you like to be an advocate for

Beginning inquiry by looking at what others are saying

This approach actually begins the research process by looking at what others are saying.

- Review respected national and local news sites/publication for articles and editorials and related blogs (New York Times, NPR, CNN, FOX News, and related blogs).
- Review respected special interest publications and websites and related blogs (Sports Illustrated, Rolling Stone, Nature).
- Review respected magazines and websites that are known for exploration of timely and controversial issues (Atlantic, Harpers, Time).
- Do some informal, primary research. Ask your professor, friends, family members: What are public issues do they think are worth more discussion/attention?
- What issues/problems are related to your major area of study? What problems do professionals in your field debate?

Understanding Potential Topics/Issues

You should now have several potential issues, and you will need several to choose from. You don't want to put all your eggs in one basket, so to speak. So the next step is to decide which issues/topics have the most potential and most interest to you. To do this you need to evaluate each for its depth, complexity, and available information about for you to write successfully argumentative essay.

Understanding the issue/topic and gathering background information.

It is important to have some initial understanding and background to your issue/topic. This information will give you a solid grounding and make you better able to critically engage in other sources you will find. What you are probably looking for here is general information that introduces issues, concepts, terminology and even future ways to search for more information

Exploring the complexity of your issue: Using

Where to look for general information:

- General encyclopedias:

Wikipedia: yes this is a good source for initial background information, especially since you may also find references and sources to get your research started. Remember, you don't use Wikipedia or any other general encyclopedia (such as *Britannica*) as a source in an college paper.

- Online specialized reference sources,

These include specialized encyclopedias and subject/issue specific resources. Many of these are available through the library [Electronic Reference Tools](#) . These specialized general reference sources allow you to focus where you are looking for information and makes your searching more efficient. Here are a few of the resources you will find on the library Electronic Reference Tool page:

- Credo--specialized dictionaries, encyclopedia, and overview sources: <http://search.credoreference.com/>
- Refdeks-specialized dictionaries, encyclopedia, and overview sources and more: <http://www.refdesk.com/topency.html>
- Facts on File--covers a seemingly unlimited amount of information organized by subject/issue/topic: <http://online.infobaselearning.com/Default.aspx>
- CQ Researcher: <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>

Existence/Fact (Definition) Questions/Point of Contention

Stasis as a Heuristic.

A Stasis approach uses a set of formal, exploratory questions that identify categorical points of disagreement (not the *what* that is being debated but rather *the type* of the debate). Stasis Theory is based on an argumentative process that begins with the existence of a problem and moves (progresses) to a resolution to the problem (often associated with an action). Stasis occurs when the progress of problem resolution stops due to disagreement. Each stasis point indicates the basis of disagreement or the roadblock to consensus.

The Stasis points of debate:

- Definition of Existence/Fact
- Cause and Effect
- Evaluation
- Ethics
- Proposal or Recommendation

You should use stasis to guide your research to make sure it is thorough and to analyze the arguments you find in your research. .

- Is this an issue/problem that not everyone agrees exist? Or if the problem itself is recognized as an existing problem, are aspects of the issue or problem’s existence questioned?
- Are there facts involved with this issue/problem that everyone doesn’t see as true?
- Are there terms associated with the issue/topic that depending on how they are defined affect how people view the topic? Are people using/applying different terms with the issue/topic or aspects of the topic?
- Is there disagreement on how to categorize the aspects of issue/topic, or the issue topic itself? For example, is same-sex marriage an issue of legal and religious precedent or is it a civil rights issue?

Cause and Effect Questions/Points of Contention	Evaluation Questions/Points of Contention
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is this a issue/problem that not everyone might see as relevant, important, or meaningful because they might not be aware of who it will effect or what the potential effects might matter?• Is there disagreement about what the causes are for the issue/problem or elements of the issue/problem?• Is the disagreement on what the potential effects of the issue/problem or elements of the issue/problem might be? Might people disagree on what to do about the issue because they disagree about what caused it? Are multiple causes identified, with each bringing about a new set of problems for resolution?• Who are the constituencies in the issue/problem, both those who are associated with its cause and are or would be affected by it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there questions of better/best, effective/ineffective/ appropriate/inappropriate or feasible/infeasible associated with any elements but particularly potential resolutions for the issue/problem or any of its elements?• Are there concerns about unintended consequences/effects of potential resolutions for the issue/problem?• Are there questions about incomplete or incorrect information and knowledge about the issue/problem or related elements?• Is there disagreement about the law and legal implications about the issue/problem?

Ethical Questions/Points of Contention	Recommendations/Propositions Questions/Points of Contention
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there disagreement on the ethical stances involved in the issue/problem and related elements? Are ethical/ideological/moral positions an issue for the debate?• Are there ethical ramifications for the stakeholders and constituencies associated with the issue/problem or its elements?• Are positions of the debate grounded in the ethical/ideological/moral?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there conflict among several potential recommendations for solving the problem based on potential effectiveness or ramifications?• Are there smaller issue/problems that have potential resolutions that are separate but related to the issue/problem?• Is there debate over the effectiveness of past resolutions implemented to resolve the issue/problem?

When to Narrow/When Broaden**Broadening: Is it the topic or the research?**

When evaluating your potential problems issues/problems you need to remember that you will need to write three different arguments each with a different stasis strategy and a different main claim. Issues/problems too narrowly defined sound more like a single main point or claim and often focus on a single resolution.

Your preliminary research might indicate that you are searching to narrowly or that your issue/topic needs to be broadened if:

- The majority of your research sources basically make the same point, or repeats similar information.
- You could only find information that explores what the issue/topic is.
- You could only find research that addresses a single stasis point, such as what should be done (either/or)
- Your research primarily resulted in news articles (primarily the what) that provides little in-depth analysis.
- Your research takes the perspective from a single constituency

Here are questions to ask to help broaden a topic

- What larger issue could this issue/problem be considered a part of?
- Why does the issue represent a problem?
- What larger issue could this issue/problem be related to?
- Is there a larger issue that caused this issue/problem?
- If you had to place the issue/problem in a subject area or category, what might it be (and there might be more than one).

Narrowing

You also need to remember that you have limited time (less than a semester) to research and write three arguments of less than 1300 words. While each of the argumentative essays can be on slightly different elements of an issue/problem, they need to be related and based on body coherent research materials that you can collect, read, and synthesize in a timely manner. Identifying an issue as too broad has as much to do with the knowledge you bring to the topic as the topic itself.

Your preliminary research might indicate that you are searching too broadly or that your issue/topic needs to be narrowed or broadened if:

- It is difficult to find any similarity across your sources. They seem unrelated and all address different issues.
- They don't have shared terms for discussing the topic.
- They don't work together to help you better understand the issue/topic as a whole.
- There doesn't seem to be a shared conversation operating between the sources.

Here are questions to ask to help narrow a topic:

- How does the issue manifest itself as other more concrete issues/problems?
- If you had to subdivide this issue/problem into categories, what would those categories be?
- What elements of the issue/problem seem more manageable for you?
- What are three to five specific ways to focus this issue/problem, such as stakeholders or constituencies?

Evaluating Your Options

Now that you have potential issue/problems you need to determine which you want to commit yourself too. Here are some additional questions you should ask yourself.

- What am I most interested in?
- Which issues/topics allow you to follow that interest?
- Which have enough sources for me to find and do the sources represent multiple points of view?
- Which issue/problem is that I can really do inquiry based research on and be willing to engage in argumentation and be willing to listen to other’s information and point of view?
- Which is the most manageable while also providing me a challenge as a researcher and writer?

Blog Assignment: Beginning the Research Journey

College Composition II

The First Step: Exploration and Discovery

Research often begins with a spark of inspiration which stimulates curiosity. And what stimulates our curiosity is generally relevant to our world. Researchers engage with ongoing conversations, but sometimes they need to find out what those conversations are.

So, the first step in your research journey this semester is to explore what the possibilities are. So before you settle on your research topic, you will engage in some pre-research to find out what is being discussed in the public realm and what is being said.

To help you do this I have compiled a list of mostly online, general-current-issues websites/publications. While these sites, like every piece of communication, have a political or ideological perspective (bias), all these sources are credible and offer a wealth of information. You need not agree with the position presented in the article; you are only identifying a potential issue for you or other students.

This is a collaborative project, everyone will find and post articles on the BB blog site (Exploring Issues) to compile a rich list of possibilities for the class as a whole.

What You Will Do

1. Using the Exploring Issues blog on Blackboard you are to include one post that provides information on three articles. What you find/share should relate to three separate topics/issues which
 - Involve a debatable or controversial issue
 - Are complex (more than a statement of fact or either/or position)
 - Are current, relevant, and interesting (to you as a human being, researcher, writer, or reader)

Note: You can post articles on 3 totally different issues/topics. And you don't have to choose the topic you posted as your research topic.

2. For each article, include a significant quote.
3. For each article, add your own commentary about the potential topic, including why it is relevant, interesting, or important.

Guidelines:

While you may find articles from sources not on the list below, part of this project’s goals is to introduce you to credible online sources you may not be familiar with. Two of your articles (entries on the wiki) must be from the list provided.

Each source is worth 5 points with two potential quality points (a maximum of 17 points).

Provide the source in APA format.

Use this model for your three entries:

"The Outrageous 5-year Rise of College Sports Spending" *The Atlantic* January 17, 2013 Jordan Weissman
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/01/the-outrageous-5-year-rise-of-college-sports-spending/267287/>

Quote from the Article: “The bottom line, though, is that there are hundreds of colleges in this country where, in the face of ever shrinking state funding, administrators are choosing to spend millions on sports programs with only the faintest hope that they’ll one day see a return on their investment other than the dubious intangible benefits of having a few second-rate sports squads around to keep up school spirit. Moreover, they’re spending more on those programs every year. Even if athletics only make up a relatively small fraction of their overall budgets, this seems like a place where more of higher ed needs to think about cutting.”

This is your own comment on the issue.

Comment: College sports has lots of issues people disagree with and this article not only addresses what college athletic programs can cost, but ties that to the overall high costs of a college education. The article is very short, but it does introduce an interesting issue.

Research Resources

Here are resources for you to explore in your search for your current issue for the class. Use these sources (and others) to see what conversations exist and what represents for you an engaging, relevant, and interesting topic that is currently being discussed and debated. Two of your three articles need to come from one of these sources.

- The NY Times: Room for Debate <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate?page=3>
- The Atlantic: Overview of Issues <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/backissues>
- Ted Talks: Main Website <http://www.ted.com/> List of topics <http://www.ted.com/talks/tags>
- NPR: Main Site <http://www.npr.org/>
- NPR Ted Hour <http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/?showDate=2015-07-24>
- American Radio Works <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/documentaries.php>
- On the Media <http://www.onthemedial.org/2014/jan/>
- The New Republic Reader: <http://reader.tnr.com/>
- Education Week: Main Page <http://www.edweek.org>
- Blogs <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/blogs/index.html?intc=thed>
- The American Civil Liberties Union: Main Page <http://www.aclu.org/> Topics Page <http://www.aclu.org/key-issues>

- CQ Researcher: <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>
- All Things Considered <http://www.npr.org/programs/all-things-considered/>
- Blogs <http://www.npr.org/blogs/>
- World News Digest (please note this site provides many traditional issues for student papers, while many are still relevant, many also fall in the somewhat “tired” or “overdone category): Topic Page http://www.2facts.com/wnd_menu.aspx?ID=digest-menu-topics

Potential Issues Presentation

A non-portfolio Project: 100 points

The purpose of this project is to help you find, evaluate and select an issue/topic for your research and writing this semester. This project is a part of pre-research and is inquiry driven. You are not looking for a specific point of view on an issue but you are looking for an issue that is rich and complex for research and argumentation.

You will work in a group to explore and present about an issue (these issues might have come from the class blog posts or be one the two of you think of on your own). You will not be required to actually select this issue.

What you will do

You will be creating a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation that will be shared with the class. We will then as a class review the potential issues, evaluate them (maybe add and delete some) and we will form issue groups. From there you will engage in focused research so to begin writing arguments.

Remember you are identifying an issue, not a specific argument. You are not presenting a specific argument (thesis statement) or taking a side on a specific issue. While you may individually already have a specific position/point of view regarding the issues, you are discussing/presenting with an open mind.

Questions to answer about the issues you present (three to five):

- What is the issue and why is it relevant and worth exploring?
- Is the topic complex with various argument and sub-issues (is it more than an either/or topic). How is the issue complex or nuanced?
- What are potential questions for research and issues for debate (refer to Stasis Theory)?
- Is there adequate research and evidence for an extended research project?
- What are potential problems or challenges associated with the issue?

Sharing Your Information

You will post your presentation to the class Exploring Issues blog and submit the presentation as an assignment (both authors of each presentation will need to submit it.),

Choosing a Topic

Once the issues/topics have presented the class will narrow down possibilities, based on group interest. Students will work in self-defined groups of 3 to 4 on a selected the issue throughout the semester. The groups will work together on gathering resources, but each student within the group has freedom to focus on a specific aspect of the issue and will be creating their own individual argumentative essays.

A Sample Presentation

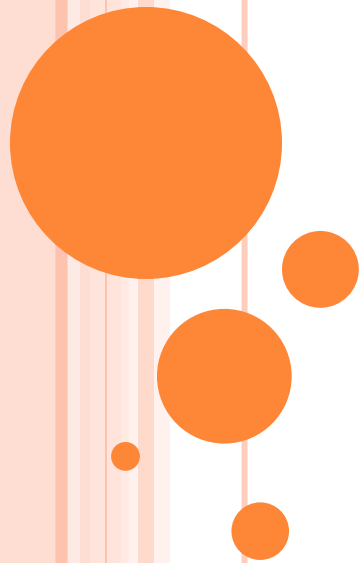
A sample of a student Potential Issue Presentation is posted on Blackboard—and remember it is a sample to give you an idea of what this presentation could look like (not a definitive model).

**POTENTIAL ISSUES
PRESENTATION**

HUMANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

CCII SPRING 2014

By:



WHAT IS THE ISSUE AND WHY IS IT RELEVANT/WORTH EXPLORING?

- IT IS MOST DEFINITELY COMPLEX—IT IS ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, IDEOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND PERSONAL
- HUMANS ARE CONSTANTLY INTERACTING WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT
- THINGS AFFECTING THE ENVIRONMENT DIRECTLY IMPACT OUR QUALITY OF LIFE
- HUMANS DON'T AGREE ON HOW TO INTERACT WITH AND MAINTAIN OUR ENVIRONMENT, BUT HOW WE DO know IT AFFECTS EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING ON THE PLANET



POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

- WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO BE STEWARD'S TO OUR ENVIRONMENT?
- HOW ARE HUMANS INVOLVED IN ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION?
- WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND POLLUTION?
- WHAT IS AN "INVASIVE SPECIES" AND WHAT PROBLEMS DO THEY CAUSE?
- WHAT IS HUMANITY'S ROLE IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT?
- WHAT IS "STEWARDSHIP" AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT OUR ROLE IN THE ABOVE?



RESEARCH AVAILABLE

- GREENFILE RESEARCH DATABASE (ON ROWAN.EDU UNDER LIBRARY SERVICES AND E-RESOURCES)
- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY(EPA) AND UNITED NATIONS PUBLISH REPORTS AND CONDUCTS STUDIES
- EVERY STATE IN THE US HAS A DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES THAT ALSO PUBLISHES REPORTS OR STUDIES DONE INDEPENDENTLY FROM THE EPA
- SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC JOURNALS, SUCH AS *APPLIED ECOCOLGY AND ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH JOURNAL* AND *Nature*.



THREE SPECIFIC SOURCES

Kolbert, E. (2013). *The sixth extinction*. Boston:Picador.

Friedman, Lauri S. Friedman (editor). (2010) *Recycling*.
Detroit: Greenhaven Press.

Keystone Pipeline (2015). *Wikipedia*



POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Since this topic involves the entire planet and all living creatures on it, it is pretty amazingly broad. One one need to find an area to focus on, such as by location (the Artic), a particular problem (vanishing species), a human activity (trafficking of illegal wildlife or fracking), or proposed solutions to environmental degradation (carbon taxes).
- This topic involves a lot a technical/scientific research and some might be difficult to understand, but without it one might not be able to create informed/reasoned arguments.
- This topic also involves a lot of very strong opinions by many people, much of which is ideological, emotional, and not necessarily fact based.



WHAT IS THE ISSUE AND WHY IS IT RELEVANT/WORTH EXPLORING?

- HUMANS ARE CONSTANTLY INTERACTING WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT
- THINGS AFFECTING THE ENVIRONMENT DIRECTLY IMPACT OUR QUALITY OF LIFE
- HUMANS DON'T AGREE ON HOW TO INTERACT WITH AND MAINTAIN OUR ENVIRONMENT, BUT HOW WE DO IT AFFECTS EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING ON THE PLANET



POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

- HOW ARE HUMANS INVOLVED IN CAUSING SPECIES EXTINCTION ?
- HOW ARE HUMANS INVOLVED IN ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION?
- WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND POLLUTION?
- WHAT IS AN “INVASIVE SPECIES” AND WHAT PROBLEMS DO THEY CAUSE?
- WHAT IS HUMANITY’S ROLE IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT?
- WHAT IS “STEWARDSHIP” AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT OUR ROLE IN THE ABOVE?

