

English 120 Documented Research Paper Timeline and Instructions

Assignment:

For your research paper, you will have the opportunity to pursue a current and relevant issue/problem of your choice. Although this leaves you open to various possibilities, which is exciting, it can also become overwhelming. Therefore, I encourage you to start brainstorming by asking yourself questions. You should say to yourself “I’ve noticed x (in the world, in new York city, on the news lately, in the subway, in my school, in my family’s experience, in my neighborhood, in my own life, etc.) and it seems to be a problem I’m interested in exploring further. I wonder...

1. Does this problem truly exist? (**Fact**)
2. How is the problem defined or characterized by others, including researchers/experts? (**Definition**)
3. What caused - or still causes - the problem? (**Cause**)
4. Are the current methods to combat the problem effective/moral/good? (**Value**)
5. What else can we do to approach a solution to this problem? (**Action**)
6. Who should decide or take charge in solving this problem? (**Jurisdiction**)

Therefore, the model for this assignment is: inquiry and exploration. This means that instead of coming up with a thesis off the bat, you are going to come up with a focused research question, which will certainly then develop smaller questions for you. Eventually, you will formulate a thesis, but this should not come until you are close to finishing your research and perhaps not even until the writing of most of your paper is complete.

Using Stasis Questions:

The questions I have listed above derive from the *stases system*, devised by classical rhetoricians (remember those guys?) to help sort out an issue. “Stasis” means “standstill.” What we are doing when we use the *stasis questions* is finding where an argument about an issue comes to a standstill. They can be used at every stage of the research process, from helping a writer find initial research questions, narrowing down and refining a research question, finding a methodology for sorting research, analyzing a conversation about a topic, and organizing the final paper.

The *stasis questions* are hierarchical. That is, we cannot address **action** unless we have resolved the first four or we cannot address **defining** a problem unless we’ve established a problem exists. However, the last stases, **jurisdiction**, can go anywhere; often, we might find the issue is who defines a problem, as we will see below. The others, though, need to be resolved before we can move on. If a writer enters a conversation about an issue in one of the later stases, it is because there is already agreement on the earlier *stasis questions*. Many beginning arguers want to jump right to **value** or **action** without looking at the other issues that might be involved in the debate, such as **causes**. Many might also have broad conceptions of a topic. Others might see the debate strictly in pro/con terms. However, the *stasis questions* show us how to narrow our focus, what other issues might be contentious in a debate, where the real contention lies in a debate, and that there are often more than just two sides to a debate. They can also be a guide to start finding research on a topic.

For example, say we want to research childhood obesity in the US. We would ask:

1. Are US children obese?
2. What counts as “obese” versus “pudgy,” “overweight,” or “baby fat”? How do we define obesity? Is the real problem “fat shaming”?
3. Why are US children obese? Is it video games? Fast food? Neglectful parents? Vending machines in schools? The cookie monster? Advertising aimed at children? Etc.
4. Are methods to combat obesity effective, such as more exercise?
5. How should we solve childhood obesity? Ban vending machines in schools? Limit television? Ban sugary snacks in schools? Tax soda and cookies? Make the cookie monster change his song? Ban advertising towards children? Sue fast food companies?
6. Should the government be mandating, should the schools be making rules, should parents be responsible for helping children avoid obesity, etc.?

The multiple answers to some *stasis questions* show we need to further narrow the topic. For example, one writer might decide that children are not obese because the Body Mass Index is an inaccurate way to judge obesity or say that we are shaming children who might otherwise be healthy for being somewhat overweight. As we can see, though, we are finding many questions in the cause area, so we might want to restart the questions from there by picking one cause and coming up with new questions about it. Say we wanted to focus on advertising aimed at children as a cause of childhood obesity. Our new questions would be:

1. Are advertisers of junk food targeting children?
2. What is “junk food”? And what characteristics do the advertisements have?
3. Why are they targeting children? Are they causing obesity?
4. Is it moral for them to be allowed to target children with these ads? Are these ads effective in making children want junk food?
5. Should the government ban advertising of junk food towards children or make them take the toys out of Happy Meals? Is it too restrictive for the government to regulate the advertisement of companies?
6. Is it the government’s responsibility to mandate companies to stop advertising towards children, the company’s responsibility to make a moral choice, or parents’ responsibility to say “no” and stop buying junk food?

As you can see, we now have a more narrow focus. Using these questions as a focus in the beginning stages of research can often help us find more interesting angles on a topic as well. For example, a writer who originally wanted to examine whether abstinence-only sex education was effective found some surprising answers to her second stasis question: What does abstinence-only sex education teach? From there, she changed her topic to research the problems and effects of gender stereotyping in abstinence-only sex education. Using the stasis questions as a guide helps us see more of the subtle disagreements in a debate on a topic.

Writers going through this method might find that they have a sufficient research topic by the time they get to stasis question #3 (**causes**). That is, they find so many different answers that they don’t need to address value, action, or jurisdiction in their paper, and they might be effective in writing a 10 page paper without reaching those levels. For example, a writer researching racial self-segregation in high school cafeterias might have enough to write about with the first three questions: 1. Are students segregating themselves by race in high school cafeterias? 2. What is racial self-segregation? 3. Why are they doing so? How is our culture encouraging this behavior? How might schools be encouraging it?

Once a writer’s questions are finalized, they can be used as a reading tool in research. That is, when we find an answer to one of the questions in a source, we can highlight it in the source and even keep a document that collects data answering each of the questions. They could also lead to color-coding this research. Once we have our research, we can then use the questions to find agreements and disagreements or to find what the most contentious issues are in the conversation on the topic. We can then enter the conversation where it matters most. Finally, when writing our final papers, we can use the stases as an organizing tool, which helps us present a logical, coherent argument.

Basic Research Paper Guidelines

- The Research Paper must be 9-10 pages.
- All stages and drafts must be typed in MLA format—double spaced, in Times New Roman 12 pt. font, with 1” margins, and with proper in-text citations and a Works Cited Page.
- You are required to use a minimum of 5 sources, which should be diverse, meaning that you should try to balance both what kind of sources you are using and how you are using them, based on your specific research topic/question. We will learn how to search for books in the library and for articles in online databases. One of the 5 sources must be a scholarly or peer-reviewed article (We will also go over this during our library visit) and all of them must be credible. You may also consider conducting an interview, using magazines, newspapers, online videos, graphs, charts, and credible websites.
- You are required to complete 3 Research Logs in proper MLA format prior to writing your Research Essay. These will together build a long form annotated bibliography.
- You should plan to use the *stasis questions* and also utilize various writing methods, as well as Aristotle’s “Ethos, Logos, and Pathos” within this essay.

YOU WILL COMPLETE THE RESEARCH PAPER IN STAGES

No latter stage may be submitted until the prior stage has been completed.

Stage One: Proposed Rough Topic – Due Fri, Oct 14th

Identify a single topic/issue you plan to research in 1 or 2 sentences.

Stage Two: Library Visit - Narrowed Topic and Research Questions Due Tue, Oct 18th

List a minimum of 5 questions you need to address. (What do you need to know *at this point* to understand and support your topic? You will not be graded on prior knowledge of your topic, but on the specificity and pertinence of your questions. I suggest you use the *stasis questions* (above) to help you at this stage. Note: Research often gives you more questions and leads to different conclusions. Write them down as you research!

Stage Three: Narrowed Research Question and Research Log 1 – Due Tue, Nov 1st

At this point, you should have a complex and well-thought out guiding question. From this larger question, you will also certainly have smaller questions. Again, you can use the *stasis questions* to help you further narrow down your exploration of your topic. Your main research question and 3 smaller questions should be stated at the beginning of your Research Log. Additionally, you will cite 4 sources that you looked into about your topic. Out of those 4 sources, you will choose 2 that you think will be most useful for responding to your research questions and annotate them. (We will discuss the annotation process in further detail).

Stage Four: Research Log 2 – Due Tue, Nov 8th

Your research question may have slightly changed based on the research you have conducted at this point. You should still have smaller questions as well. Again, you can use the *stasis questions* to help you further think through your topic. Your main research question and 3 new smaller questions that come from it should be stated at the beginning of your Research Log. Additionally, you will cite 4 additional sources that you looked into about your topic. Out of those 4 sources, you will choose 2 that you think will be most useful for responding to your research questions and annotate them.

Stage Five: Research Log 3 – Due Tue, November 15th

Your research question again may have slightly changed based on the research you have conducted at this point. You should still have smaller questions as well. Again, you can use the *stasis questions* to help you further think through your topic. Your main research question and 3 new smaller questions that come from it should be stated at the beginning your Research Log. Additionally, you will cite 3 additional sources that you looked into about your topic. Out of those 3 sources, you will choose 2 that you think will be most useful for responding to your research questions and annotate them. By the end of this research log, you should start formulating your working thesis argument.

Stage Six: First Draft (5 pages) – Due Tue, Nov 22nd

- 1) This must be a draft of at least 5 pages and a separate Works Cited page and at least 3 sources incorporated.
- 2) At this stage you should have a working thesis, meaning that it may change a bit as you finish writing your essay. Writing often helps us to explore our questions further and fine tune our own opinion about an issue.
- 3) It should be in MLA format—double spaced, in 12 pt. font, with 1” margins and proper citations.

Stage Seven: Second Draft (7 pages) – Due Fri, Dec 2nd

- 1) This must be 8-10 pages long with a title and a separate Works Cited page with at least 5 sources incorporated.
- 2) It should be in MLA format—double spaced, in Times New Roman 12 pt. font, with 1” margins and proper citations.
- 3) At this stage you should have developed a nearly final thesis argument in response to your research question(s) and have gone back through to make sure that the evidence in your essay supports your conclusive thesis. In reviewing your work before handing it in, you should be able to identify why you used the evidence you chose to illustrate your thesis, why you organized the paragraphs as you did, what the purpose of each paragraph is, and checked to see if each paragraph supports and ties back to your thesis. You will have considered various viewpoints on the issue, including oppositions to your own, as well as your readers’ questions.

-You will also have looked at your paper with the eyes of your readers who do not want to fall asleep or pull their hair out (Don't be afraid to use your voice and find your style). You will have made your essay flow with clear sentences and transitions and will have made it interesting to read. You will have checked your use of sources: making sure that no more than about 15-25 percent (about 2-3 pages) of your paper is quotation (I want to hear your voice), that you used signal phrases where necessary to incorporate these quotations, that you paraphrased or quoted correctly, and that you cited your sources properly in your essay and on your Works Cited page. Finally, you will have done an intensive grammar, mechanics, and format check after you have checked all of the above.

4) Attach the rubric, on which you have assessed your own essay.

Stage Eight: Five-Minute Oral Presentation – Due Week of December 6th

- 1) Create a 5-minute presentation in which you aim to increase your peers' knowledge of and interest in your topic. Be creative and organized – use handouts, props, technology, other resources, enthusiasm, drama, humor, or whatever works for you!
- 2) Be sure to speak clearly, slowly, and loudly, so that all can hear you.
- 3.) More details to come as this approaches!

Stage Nine: Final Draft (9-10 pages) – Due Fri, Dec 16th

1) This must be a polished essay. Here, you have applied your own discerning eye with the knowledge of what to look for and adjust based on our class work. You will have also consider both my comments and those of your peers to make your essay shine.

Note: I may ask you to submit your research paper to turnitin.com to avoid plagiarism.

Rubrics to Follow