
Topic Vetting

Rationale: Recently we have been working on topic selection and question development. It is important that you expand your thinking to encompass the incredible variety of possibilities. However, it is also important that you eventually focus onto one feasible and exciting relevant topic. In this activity you will take your top 3 topics, hopefully decide which one is best, and refine that question.

Steps Of This Assignment:

1. **List Your Questions** → For this activity, you will choose your best 3 questions. Make a copy of this document and then write each question in the space provided on the following pages.
2. **Give Each Question a Preliminary Grade For Each Aspect:** Your grades can be based on whatever criteria you decide, we suggest: A+, A, B, C... as well as “?” or “unknown”.
Note: YOU ARE NOT BEING GRADED HERE, you are grading your own topic to honestly to find the best one. This has no connection to your grade on this assignment.
3. **Test Your Questions:** In class we will run as many tests as we can for each aspect of each question. You may not get to test them all, so consider testing the aspects you feel most unsure about. See the protocols on the next page. Make sure to take detailed notes about the results from each test.
4. **AFTER PRESENTATIONS and feedback from classmates, Give Each Question a Final Grade For Each Aspect:** Use your feedback/comment notes. Again, the grades you give the aspect of each question will not be reflected in your grade on this assignment.
5. **Reflect:** When you have finished testing all aspects of all topics, please take some time to write a reflection about what the tests revealed for each question. The following should be discussed.
 - a. Why you are considering this question? (What inspired you and attracts you to it?)
 - b. What could make this question an excellent choice for 7-8 months of research.
 - c. What could make this topic difficult to work with?
 - d. What feedback did you receive that was unanticipated, but highly valuable?
 - e. What types of research methods might you apply to this topic?
 - f. How might this question be refined to improve its grade?

ASPECTS EXPLAINED

Aspect	Suggested Test Protocols
Scope/Focus: Is your focus too broad? Is it too narrow? Remember, when crafting your topic, you will be adjusting this a lot, but it should be in the right “ballpark” for now. The scope should be narrow enough that it is approachable, but broad enough that it warrants the time you will spend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Brainstorm-In/Out● Charrette
Personal Interest: Why do you care? You are going to be working with this topic for 8+ months, you had better not get sick of it. A common mistake is to choose a topic you think teachers and judges will be impressed with, but one that you are not passionate about.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Psychological Interview● Critical Friend Chat● Charrette
Feasibility: Do you have the ability to study this topic? Do you have access to the information needed? Do you have the capability to take your own source photos for this topic or (better yet) access your subject matter to work from observation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Charrette
Originality: Have you identified the unique way you can explore this topic? It is very common for a researcher to come up with an amazing question, only to find out others have already researched or explored the topic in detail. Don't worry! If you move your focus just a little bit, you can use that similar research to help “ <u>frame the gap</u> ”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Charrette

PROTOCOLS

BRAINSTORM IN/OUT: Write your current topic in the middle of a document and make a word-web by branching out with either more specific topics, or (less likely) more broad topics. You might see a concept in your brainstorming that makes more sense in terms of scope than your original idea does.

CHARETTE: <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/charrette.pdf> This protocol is designed to allow you to informally listen to a group of others discuss a partially-formed idea. This is test is especially good for ideas that you are looking to REFINE!

CRITICAL FRIEND CHAT: Pull someone aside for a quick 5 minute chat. This should be someone you trust and have a good rapport with. Ask them to criticize your topic and play “devil’s advocate” with it. They should be arguing reasons why your topic does *NOT* meet the aspect you are trying to test. You should be defending your topic. If you feel like you can answer most of their criticisms, (even if you think of the defense after the talk), you probably have a good topic.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVIEW: Have a friend you trust sit with you and ask you questions about how your topic connects to you personally. They should try to get deeper and deeper into your personality and your values. This can get quite personal so pick someone you trust. Often you will discover what is at the root of your interest and you might change your entire topic to get closer to that core value or interest.

TOPIC #1:

Aspect	Prelim Grade	Final Grade	Protocols Performed: Comments/Feedback
Scope/Focus			
Personal Interest			
Feasibility			
Originality			

Reflection Paragraph:

EXAMPLE (Delete and write your own):

My topic idea of “Natural Observations” definitely seemed too broad in scope when I thought about it more. I am very interested in the flora and fauna around the rivers and ditches in my hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico. When I performed the “brainstorm in/out” protocol, I was able to define my more precise interest in arthropods and the shared body types of insects and crustaceans. I think exploring the anatomical similarities between animals such as beetles and crawdads would be very interesting.

This topic is of great personal interest to me and carries a nostalgic value, as I used to spend a lot of time outdoors as a child searching for interesting animals and plants. When my friend did a psychological interview with me, she helped me uncover the fact that this topic brings up a lot of fond memories of my father as well. He instilled a love of nature in me as a child as well as a scientific/naturalist/entomologist mindset, as we would often go on hikes and explore together. We loved identifying different plants, butterflies, and birds, and I think exploring the specimens around me in sort of a naturalist Audubon-like illustrative fashion could be quite challenging and fulfilling.

This topic seems entirely feasible, as I have ready access to walking trails where I can take photos. I would need to make sure that my artworks evolve over time--not just demonstrating straight depictions of the world around me but also branching into potentially more abstract forms. I hope to employ several mixed media and use layering techniques, which might add a nostalgic feel to the pieces. I think this style will also help the work feel more original, more “me,” rather than photorealistic rendering.

TOPIC #2:

Aspect	Prelim Grade	Final Grade	Test(s) Performed: Comments/Feedback
Scope/Focus			
Personal Interest			
Feasibility			

Originality			

Reflection Paragraph:

TOPIC #3:

Aspect	Prelim Grade	Final Grade	Test(s) Performed: Comments/Feedback
Scope/Focus			
Personal Interest			
Feasibility			
Originality			

Reflection Paragraph: