

# Preparing for the Research Proposal

## The Research Model<sup>1</sup>

The research model provides students a way to approach an issue of significance and work it through individually and in small groups. Its organization follows the major elements of reasoning.

Paper	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Identify your issue or problem.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What is the issue or problem?</li><li>b. Who are the stakeholders and what are their positions?</li><li>c. What is your position?</li></ol></li><li>2. Read about your issue and identify points of view or arguments through information sources.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What are my print sources?</li><li>b. What are my media sources?</li><li>c. What are my people sources?</li><li>d. What are my preliminary findings based on a review of existing sources?</li></ol></li><li>3. Form a set of questions that can be answered by a specific set of data?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Examples: What would be the results of ___? Who would benefit and by how much? Who would be harmed and by how much?</li></ol></li><li>4. Gather evidence through research techniques such as surveys, interviews, or other experiments.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What survey questions should I ask?</li><li>b. What interview questions should I ask?</li><li>c. What experiments should I do?</li></ol></li></ol>
Project	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Manipulate and transform data so that it can be interpreted.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How can I summarize what I found?</li><li>b. Should I develop charts, diagrams, or graphs to represent my ideas?</li></ol></li><li>6. Draw conclusions or inferences.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What do the data mean? How can I interpret what I found?</li><li>b. What conclusions and inferences can be drawn from my results?</li></ol></li><li>7. Determine implications and consequences.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What are the implications and consequences of my results in light of the initial problem?</li><li>b. Do I know enough or are there new questions to be answered?</li></ol></li></ol>
Product	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. Communicate results.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How will I communicate my results?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Written report</li><li>ii. Oral Presentation</li><li>iii. Multimedia Presentation</li></ol></li></ol></li></ol>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Gifted Education, School of Education, College of William and Mary

## An Example of Steps 1-3<sup>2</sup>

The rate of adolescent pregnancy is disturbing. Various agencies from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to the local Howard County Health Department have addressed the issue, but significant progress still needs to be made. Although interest in the role of male adolescent parenthood is increasing, most research on adolescent parenthood has been conducted on adolescent females.

The psychology of adolescent fatherhood is an excellent area for a research study because of the significance of the father-child relationship and because many audiences would benefit from the research.

Example Problem, Product, Audience:

Problem: How can the high school guidance department meet the needs of adolescent fathers?

Product: A guide for teaching parenthood to high school males.

Audience: High School Guidance department

Problem: How can the high school guidance department effectively counsel male students to lower the number of adolescent pregnancies?

Product: A video that covers the legal, economic, and psychological problems and responsibilities associated with adolescent fatherhood.

Audience: High school health students.

Problem: Can a program developed jointly wherein the Howard County Health Department and the Howard County Board of Education work to address the problem of teenage pregnancy?

Product: A comprehensive report on adolescent fatherhood that includes: statistic, research about the social conditions that encourage adolescent fatherhood, and specific recommendations for public programs that best serve adolescent fathers and their children.

Audience: Howard County Board of Education

## Thinking about your own research... A Statement of Controlling Purpose<sup>3</sup>

Once you decide on a specific topic, the next step is to write a statement of controlling purpose. This is a sentence or collection of sentences that tells you what you want to accomplish in your research, ultimately guides your thesis in your paper, and later helps guide the project you create. Key words that often appear are *analyze, classify, compare, contrast, define, describe, determine, establish, explain, identify, prove, and support*. The controlling purpose is generally designed to (all examples begin with “The purpose of this paper is to...”):

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<sup>2</sup> Student Resource Sheet 4.6 – IR Curriculum Guide

<sup>3</sup> Writing Research Papers, McDougal-Littell Inc., 1994

- Support or argue against an idea
  - ... persuade people that foreign language instruction should begin in elementary school.
- Establish or prove false one or more statements of fact
  - ...prove that tobacco is a harmful and addictive drug.
- Determine relative value of two or more things
  - ...compare solar, wind, and wave energy to determine which is the most reliable, practical, and cost-effective alternative energy source.
- Analyze something into its parts and show how the parts relate to each other
  - ...describe the stages in the television production process and explain how those stages interrelate.
- Define something
  - ...define the phrase *freedom of the press* by explaining the nature of and limits on press freedom under the law.
- Explain causes or effects
  - ...explain the various causes of the destruction of Brazil's rain forests.
- Establish a cause-effect relationship
  - ...present the scientific evidence that suggests that cigarette smoking causes cancer.
- Describe the development of something over time
  - ...describe how rock-and-roll developed from roots in blues, gospel, and country and western music.
- Identify and describe a general trend
  - ...show that a major extinction of South American plant and animal species is now occurring.
- Classify individual items into groups or categories
  - ...classify African myths into several distinct categories (creation stories, lineage stories, etc.).
- Relate a part to a whole
  - ...examine the place of the worm in the ecosystem of a forest.
- Compare and/or contrast two subjects to determine their degree of similarity or difference
  - ...compare and contrast the views of nature in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost.
- Examine a technique
  - ...examine the use of the technique of allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- Explain a general concept by means of specific examples
  - ...explain the concept of a paradox through examples from math, language, and art.
- Explain the main idea or message of something.
  - ...explain the political message of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

\*\*Your next step, in second quarter, will be to take these statements, expound on them, and translate them into your thesis.\*\*

## Product Possibilities

- Design a web page
- Write a book
- Develop a collection
- Design a structure
- Design and conduct an experiment
- Submit writings to a journal/magazine/newspaper
- Formulate and defend a theory
- Conduct a training session
- Collect and analyze samples
- Present a proposal to a board of directors/government agency
- Design a new product
- Write or produce a play or music
- Develop a museum exhibit
- Film a movie
- Develop an advertising campaign
- Produce a video documentary
- Compile a booklet/brochure
- Draw a set of blueprints
- Design and implement a process or seminar
- Compile and annotate a set of internet resources
- Start a non-profit group/club
- Develop/market/plan an event
- Write and enact a series of lesson plans

## DRAFTING THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Ask yourself these questions in designing your proposal (many will become increasingly important in second and third quarter when you begin to enact the proposal):

\_\_\_Can you obtain access to the research resources you need, given the constraints posed by your age, your ability/inability to drive, and your daily schedule (which may preclude making phone calls between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., normal working hours)? If you have sports from 2:10 to 6:00 each day, what strategies will you use to get to the places you need to go, communicate with the people you'll need?

\_\_\_Since it's better to do a little thoroughly than a lot superficially, have you significantly limited your goals, product, and audience?

\_\_\_Are you undertaking this project to educate yourself exclusively, or are you addressing a problem that really needs a solution or attempting to answer a question of concern or interest to an audience other than yourself and your teacher?

\_\_\_Do you really have **access** to the audience you have in mind? Specifically, how will you deliver your product to your audience? Will you drive it there or send it electronically? Will you pony it by inter-school mail? Will you publish an article? Will you make a speech at a specific conference that's planned? If you intend to share what you've done with an audience such as the teachers at your school, how will you convince them to come hear you? Why should they? How can you convince them it would be worth their time? What time of day would be best, and what space would need to be reserved? Who has the authority to help you reserve that space? "Interested people" or "the worlds" are not real audiences.

\_\_\_Estimating processes and tasks require analysis of preliminary steps. Estimating how long each step will take requires much thought and practice. For example, just designing a questionnaire usually requires several weeks of thinking, revising, and field-testing. Lots of time needs to be allotted for the survey group to receive, complete, and return the questionnaire. Several weeks to a month or more needs to be allotted for tabulating, graphing, analyzing, and interpreting results. Have you thought of all the steps you'll have to take, and is the amount of time you've allotted to each step realistic? **Have you obtained required permissions before beginning survey research?**

\_\_\_Have you built into your proposed plan a primary role for your mentor/advisor? What's unusual about this course is your access to a professional/expert. Review your entire plan and explain explicitly how your mentor will be consulted and regularly engaged.

## EVALUATING THE RESEARCH PLAN

### **Problem:**

The Research Proposal addresses a real problem or researchable question.

Yes No

The Research Proposal makes clear and specific the strategies that will be used in the course of the research.

Yes No

### **Product:**

The Research Proposal outlines how the research process will lead to a clearly described product in addition to the synthesis paper.

Yes No

The product described in the Research Proposal can realistically be completed in an academic year or within the parameters of the G/T research course.

Yes No

### **Audience:**

The Research Proposal identifies a clearly focused audience to whom the student actually has access.

Yes No

The Research Proposal identifies a clearly focused audience that will benefit from the research-based product the student proposes to complete.

Yes No

The Research Proposal clarifies when and where the product will be delivered.

Yes No