Preliminary Report on Research Topic

Write a report on a specific area or subtopic within your overall topic that gives the reader a general overview of the subtopic and answers some basic questions about it. Length: about 750 – 1250 words (i.e. 3 – 5 pages)

The goal of this assignment is to present in a systematic way some essential background information on the topic you have chosen to research. This gives you a chance to read up on the topic and get familiar with basic ideas, terms, questions and debates.

At the end of this process, you will have:
• a greater familiarity with your topic
• a more focused area within your overall topic to research (a subtopic)
• a research question that will guide you in further research
• a hypothesis (a possible answer to your research question)
• a plan for further research

To prepare for this assignment, you will be reading mostly introductory material on your topic. You are required to use at least three sources from SCC databases (we’ll go over those in class). These might include any of the following:
• general reference works (encyclopedias and the like)
• general interest articles from magazines, newspapers and websites
• textbooks
• books for a general (non-specialist) audience

Organization

1. First, introduce your overall topic (e.g. “child psychology” or “global warming”). Define the key terms, provide the key facts, and explain the key ideas one should be familiar with. Your task here is to give your reader the basics. You are not trying to prove a point, just introduce the topic.
2. Next, introduce your subtopic (the specific area within your overall topic that you intend to focus on, such as “factors affecting psychological development” or “impact of climate change on the Puget Sound region”). It should be clear from this introduction how your subtopic is part of, but not the same as, the overall topic. Define the key terms, provide the key facts, and explain the key ideas one should be familiar with for this subtopic. Give your reader the basics; don’t try to prove a point.
3. Point out three to five questions that remain unanswered within your subtopic. That is, what are some things that even the experts don’t know? State which of these questions you have chosen for your research question.
4. State your hypothesis (what you think is the answer to your research question).
5. Finally, describe the information will you need to find to answer your research question. This will be the beginning of your research plan.

Write this up in a report (i.e. sentences and paragraphs, not just a list).
Grading Criteria

The paper will be scored on the following categories. Each will receive a score of 4, 3, 2, 1 or 0 (corresponding to the letter grades A – F). The total grade will be an average of those scores.

- **Topic** is introduced, and essential information about the topic is provided in a clear, informative, systematic and comprehensive manner (I will label this score with a T when grading your paper).
- **Subtopic** is clearly identified, distinguished from the overall topic, and appropriately focused (not too broad or too narrow), and essential information about the subtopic is provided in a clear, informative, systematic and comprehensive manner (I will label this score with an S).
- **Questions** about subtopic are clearly identified and explained (Q). Scoring:
  - 4 points: There are at least three different questions, not just different versions or parts of the same question. For example, “How does divorce affect child development?” is part of the question, “How does parental conflict affect child development?” because “divorce” is one aspect of parental conflict, so these would not count as two different questions. On the other hand, “How does growing up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood affect child development?” is a different question because it is not a subset of parental conflict.
  - 3 points: Only two different questions (including the research question), or three questions that are really just parts of the same question
  - 2 points: One or two questions in addition to the research question that are really just parts of the research question
  - 1 point: No additional questions besides the research question; presents “additional” questions that simply rephrase the research question.
- **Research question** is appropriately focused and leads to an arguable, descriptive thesis (R).
- **Areas for further research** are clearly identified and appropriately focused (A).
- **Publication data** is listed in MLA format for all sources cited, with a minimum of three reference or other works from SCC databases (P).
- **Language** (L):
  - Most of the paper is in your own words
  - Occasional brief and completely accurate quotations provided as needed to give the flavor of the original or capture an exact thought
  - The mechanics (punctuation, spelling and grammar) are correct
  - The paper provides clear transitions when moving from one idea to the next.
  - The style is objective, formal, concise, precise and varied