Questions about the Preliminary Research Report

These questions were developed by students in an earlier section of English 102. They are somewhat rough in form because they are typed notes from class.

1. Having trouble becoming more specific with topics/research questions

   - Be guided by your research. As you read you will learn more about the topic, which will give you more specific topics and questions to investigate.

   - It depends on your topic. For example, if you’re looking at natural disasters in Washington State, that’s already pretty specific. So the overall topic would more likely be natural disasters, while the subtopic is natural disasters in Washington State. Over time, you may discover that what you thought was a good subtopic is still too broad, and so you need to focus even more narrowly. For example, pick one type of natural disaster in Washington (earthquake, tsunami, floods, volcano, wildfire...)

2. There were several questions about the format/style/presentation:

   - How exactly are we starting our paper?

   - How in-depth should we go into our hypothesis? Leave it as a question (cliff hanger)? Or lead into it with some factual or supportive evidence and then leave you hanging?

   - Can you explain part 4 in depth?

   - For all these questions, have a look at the sample paper and the sample outlines developed in class (posted on the website), showing in detail what each section of the paper should cover.

3. Is it in paper form or outline form?

   - Paper form, as it says in the instructions (bottom of the first page).

4. Can it take an informal tone?

   - Somewhat, not too informal. I recommend a relatively formal academic style.

5. Do we have to include information into our prelim, or just state what we are going to be doing?

   - You have to include information in parts I and II (overview of the topic and subtopic). Parts III & IV list questions, your main research question and your answer to that question, with just a sentence or two on why you think that’s the best answer. Part V lists your strategy for researching the question you have chosen. See the sample outlines.
6. Are we supposed to cite our information on where we are gathering our questions, etc.

- List at the end of the paper the full publication data in MLA format for all sources that you got information from, alphabetically by author’s last name (or by title if no author given).
- In-text citations should list the author’s last name (or title if no author is given), and the page number if you have one, in parentheses at the end of the sentence where you use the information. All types of information, not just quotations.

7. Suggested amount of sources?

- No required number. Typical papers are in the range of 4-5 or so.

8. Do we need different types of sources (books, internet, etc) or can we just use one? Can we use film as a source?

- No special requirement. Mostly reference works (encyclopedia). May vary depending on your topic. Final research paper has more specific requirements. You may use film as a source.

9. How do I cite other people’s opinions that I agree with?

- Just say in the body that so-and-so agrees, or phrase it in such a way that shows they agree. “As XXXX has argued, …” See the “Voice Markers Template” under “Help with Writing” on the website.

10. Do you want this paper to be less factual and more opinion based? And if my opinion is meant to come into this paper, is it just at the end, after all the facts?

- No, more factual. Your opinion comes at the end, and only briefly. See the sample paper and outlines.

11. What do you mean by analytical questions?

- Analytical questions are those that you can’t just look up the answer to, or get from a knowledgeable source. They require analysis or interpretation to answer. Example:

  - Factual question: What are the types of natural disasters most likely to occur in Washington?
  - Analytical: What are the most important natural disasters, out of all those that are likely to occur? (Requires thinking about the definition of “important,” which is subject to debate.)

12. How in depth does the research question have to be?
• It depends on the topic. Example: Does renewable energy have the capacity to provide a significant amount of our energy needs? This is just right.

13. Can you show an example paper and bibliography?
• Yes, posted on the class website.

14. If we think of a new topic can we change or do we have to stick to our current topic?
• You’re allowed to change, but you must talk to me first.

15. What level of polishing is expected on this prelim report? Rough draft-ish?
• I expect grammatically correct, complete sentences, proper punctuation and spelling, paragraphs that are unified and coherent, and all main points discussed in the assignment instructions and sample outlines to be covered.

16. How to make a research topic more specific or more broad?
• See the suggestions in the UW’s Research 101 “Topics” tutorial (Narrowing & Broadening page), posted on the class website.

17. How to make a research topic arguable?
• Not very arguable: Does NASA’s continuing research show that climate change is caused by humans?
• More arguable: Is climate change caused by humans?
• More arguable: Which human activities are the biggest contributors to climate change?
• Getting more specific is often the way to make it more arguable.

18. How to make a prescriptive argument descriptive?
• Avoid all “should” statements, and all claims of value, right or wrong, morality, etc.
• Example: We lack resources, necessitating the use of volunteers and family members ... “Necessitating” could lead to a prescriptive argument: “We need to use volunteers...” “Need” can be a synonym for “should.”
• Nonprescriptive approach: using volunteers and family members will lead to better health outcomes for the aging population.
• One might agree that this approach will lead to better outcomes, but for some reason might oppose the proposal anyway (perhaps they don’t want better outcomes for some reason). In other words, this hypothetical person agrees with the diagnosis but not the prescription. Focus on the diagnosis.

19. How do we take such a limited amount of information and make it into a lengthy report?

• Get more information.

• Explain what may seem obvious to you, since your reader may not know what you know.

• Explain the significance of the facts, not just the facts themselves.

• Explain the significance of the questions.

• Explain your reasons for your hypothesis. (This is not the same as defending your hypothesis, which would require extensive factual support. Rather, this just means to give your main reasons in a sentence or two.)

20. What will be the thesis for big research paper?

• The answer to the research question will be the thesis for the final paper, although your research question may change over the next few weeks as you continue your research.

21. Is the preliminary paper a smaller version of the final paper?

• No. You may use some of the preliminary report in the final paper, but the preliminary report is strictly factual/background information. The final research paper is persuasive, proving a thesis, which means it involves your analysis, judgement, and interpretation as well as the facts themselves. They are different types of paper doing different types of tasks (informing vs. persuading).