

The CBC 1818 Research Journal

Directions: Using this word document, you will be required to keep careful notes on your ongoing research for your semester paper. You will be required to keep 5-7 pages of reading notes: brainstorming, free-writing, notes on the substantiation for your claims and notes on re-researching your thesis in light of new understanding. Students must engage in a dialogue with the sources they consult or their research is meaningless. Along the way, you'll also compose several drafts of this research paper for teacher and peer review. Be prepared to print out and hand in this journal at any time.

Techniques for Getting Words on Paper

- ▶ **Brainstorming-** A process where the writer puts down all the ideas that come into his/her head in connection with the assignment, without judging, censoring, or deciding whether they will work.
- ▶ **Listing-** A good low-stress way to get started is to list possible points, ideas, or aspects of the topic.
- ▶ **Freewriting-** Freewriting is an exercise of nonstop writing. One writes all the ideas that one can think of without worrying about grammatical correctness.
- ▶ **Make an Outline-** This is a good approach to take after one of the messier activities such as listing or brainstorming. Outlining can help make sense out of seemingly unrelated, but fresh, ideas.
- ▶ **Experiment with Thesis Statements-** Trying out possible thesis statements can help you decide what approach you want to take with the project.

Taking Notes from Research Reading

If you take notes efficiently, you can read with more understanding and also save time and frustration when you come to write your paper. These are three main principles:

1. Know what kind of ideas you need to record

Focus your approach to the topic before you start detailed research. Then you will read with a purpose in mind, and you will be able to sort out relevant ideas.

- First, review the commonly known facts about your topic, and also become aware of the range of thinking and opinions on it. Review your class notes and textbook and browse in an encyclopedia or other reference work.
- Try making a preliminary list of the subtopics you would expect to find in your reading. These will guide your attention and may come in handy as labels for notes.

- Choose a component or angle that interests you, perhaps one on which there is already some controversy. Now formulate your research question. It should allow for reasoning as well as gathering of information -- not just *what* the proto-Iroquoians ate, for instance, but *how valid the evidence* is for early introduction of corn. You may even want to jot down a tentative thesis statement as a preliminary answer to your question.
- Then you will know what to look for in your research reading: **facts** and **theories** that help answer your question, and other people's **opinions** about whether specific answers are good ones.

2. Don't write down too much

Your essay must be an expression of your own thinking, not a patchwork of borrowed ideas. Plan therefore to invest your research time in understanding your sources and integrating them into your own thinking. Your research notes will record only ideas that are relevant to your focus on the topic; and they will mostly summarize rather than quote.

- Copy out exact words only when the ideas are memorably phrased or surprisingly expressed--when you might use them as actual quotations in your essay.
- Otherwise, **compress ideas in your own words**. Paraphrasing word by word is a waste of time. Choose the most important ideas and write them down as labels or headings. Then fill in with a few sub-points that explain or exemplify.

3. Label your notes intelligently

Take notes in a way that allows for later use.

- Save bother later by developing the habit of recording bibliographic information in a master list when you begin looking at each source. Then you can quickly identify each note by the author's name and page number; when you refer to sources in the essay you can fill in details of publication easily from your master list. Keep a format guide handy. Try [The Citation Machine](#).
- <http://citationmachine.net/>
- Try as far as possible to put notes in separate categories. Even if you are keeping the notes on one Microsoft Word file, create Subheadings that record the date and topic of your notes. This will let you label the topic of each note. Not only will that keep your note-taking focused, but it will also allow for grouping and synthesizing of ideas later. It is especially satisfying to shuffle notes and see how the conjunctions create new ideas -- yours.
- Leave lots of space in your notes for comments of your own -- questions and reactions as you read, second thoughts and cross-references when you look back at what you've written. These comments can become a virtual first draft of your paper.

Name: _____

Thesis: _____

First Journal Questions to Get Your Creative Juices Flowing

Is there a story, example or particularly striking image that relates to my topic and purpose? If so, begin by describing the topic in journalistic terms:

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? So What?

Journal # 2-7 Choose one of the following question category as a writing prompt for freewriting.

As a writer, you can begin by asking yourself questions and then answering them. Your answers will bring your subject into focus and provide you with the material to develop your topic. Here are twenty questions or "thought starters" that present ways of observing or thinking about your topic. Each question generates the type of essay listed in parentheses after the question.

1. What does X mean? (Definition)
 2. What are the various features of X? (Description)
 3. What are the component parts of X? (Simple Analysis)
 4. How is X made or done? (Process Analysis)
 5. How should X be made or done? (Directional Analysis)
 6. What is the essential function of X? (Functional Analysis)
 7. What are the causes of X? (Causal Analysis)
 8. What are the consequences of X? (Causal Analysis)
 9. What are the types of X? (Classification)
 10. How is X like or unlike Y? (Comparison)
 11. What is the present status of X? (Comparison)
 12. What is the significance of X? (Interpretation)
 13. What are the facts about X? (Reportage)
 14. How did X happen? (Narration)
 15. What kind of person is X? (Characterization/Profile)
 16. What is my personal response to X? (Reflection)
 17. What is my memory of X? (Reminiscence)
 18. What is the value of X? (Evaluation)
 19. What are the essential major points or features of X? (Summary)
 20. What case can be made for or against X? (Persuasion)
- (Adapted from Jacqueline Berke's *Twenty Questions for the Writer*)