

General Research Directions

You are to select a **contemporary Pro-Con issue** that interests you, research that topic, write an essay, and make a presentation (website & voice recording) that demonstrates what you have learned about your topic. Your essay should be *three – five typed pages* with internal MLA citations. Both the essay and the presentation should have proper MLA citations and a list of works cited.

1. Selecting a Topic and Developing an Effective Research Question

Developing a focused research question and a hypothesis should be your top priority. You must begin by [selecting a broad topic or area of interest](#) and begin narrowing that broad topic. You should use a variety of resources (Internet, periodicals, reference texts, and books) as you attempt to narrow your broad Pro-Con area. As you read and research your broad topic, you should be attempting to move your very broad Pro-Con focus to a specific focus that you are tasked to present in the form of a question that you can answer. **For this project, you are discouraged from selecting topics in the following areas: guns, abortion, vaccines, or Covid-focused topics.** However, I will present examples from one of those discouraged topic areas to serve as a model.

For example, I am interested in learning more about the spread of [Covid-19 in the United States](#) and the economic impact of this disease, but that topic is far too broad or too general to be acceptable. After reading the introductory article about Covid-19 in the U.S from the Gale Database, I use the Gale Database search feature to look for additional information, and [a pattern of articles](#) emerges around the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on mental health. From that pattern I narrow my research focus to mental health in the pandemic. As I continue to [skim, scan](#), and occasionally read articles about the intersection of the pandemic and mental health and use search engines to identify articles on the web, I notice an additional pattern about unprecedented numbers of people seeking talk therapy and pursuing medical treatment for depression and anxiety. Ultimately, my **research question** might read as follows: **“To what extent has the Covid-19 pandemic created a mental health crisis in the United States and how well is this crisis being managed?”**

This question is specific enough for the purposes of a short essay, and it is a debatable, **arguable question** because it allows me to look for the **extent** to which the crisis is having an impact on both mental health and how well the crisis is being managed. Also, because there is no guarantee the impact will be entirely negative or entirely positive, I’m left with room to explore the controversy/debate surrounding my topic in my thesis and in my argument-based research essay.

2. Developing a (Hypo)Thesis

In writing your research question, you probably have a hypothetical answer in mind that’s based on your initial survey of texts (from skimming & scanning), so the answer you generate in response to your narrowed research question will become your hypothetical thesis statement. It will be important that your narrowed question is not so specific that you are unable to find a sufficient number of sources to support your discussion of this topic, yet not so broad that all you do is generalize and summarize information about your topic. In your hypothesis you must address all the parts of your research question. Your research question and your hypothesis should balance between extreme specificity and broad generalization.

3. Researching a Topic, Answering your Research Question, and Taking Notes

Once you have established your research question and hypothesis, you are required to find, read, and take notes from a variety of source types. To be considered adequate, you should aim to use a **MINIMUM of FIVE*** sources to compose your essay.

- ☐ **Periodicals-** **You must use at least TWO** articles from periodicals. Database and online articles from periodicals are not considered as a web source so **use as many as you like**.
- ☐ **Internet-** **You may use THREE or fewer** web or Internet sources in your essay. Not all Internet sources are reliable; consult with me if you think your source may be questionable.
- ☐ **Books-** You should **try to use at least ONE** book as a source for your essay. It may not be necessary for you to read an entire book. Sometimes only a chapter or chapters from a book may be suitable for your essay.

* Check with me if you would like to use any non-print sources

(like television shows, radio interviews, podcasts, films, or other non-print media) as references. I will help you navigate these media.

Here are some helpful hints to keep your research notes organized . . .

1. **Consider using note cards** to record the information that you deem most important from the sources you consult or cite. **Color-coding** the note cards can also prove helpful during the drafting of your essay. Although note taking on note cards has become, to an extent, an outmoded means of gathering & recording data, the process is still useful and highly recommended.
2. Use a variety of techniques to record the information that you plan to use in your essay; however, **it will be important for you to avoid plagiarism**. To help you avoid plagiarism, we will practice effective note-taking skills in class. These skills are described at the bottom of this page.

Plagiarism is theft. **Plagiarism can be the intentional or unintentional theft of someone else's ideas or the phrasing of those ideas.** To avoid this mistake [use the following techniques](#) (listed in order of usefulness) to record the important notes for your research products:

Paraphrase: When you use this note-taking form, you are essentially **translating** another writer's thoughts and ideas into your own language **without borrowing any of the diction or syntax from the original** writer's text. A paraphrase should be **approximately the same length** as the source. Novice researchers most often plagiarize when paraphrasing. Try to avoid doing this by not looking directly at the original when you are composing your paraphrase. Read the original then write your paraphrase of the original. Be sure to include a sense of the speaker and context along with appropriate parenthetical information.

Summary: It is acceptable to summarize a significant passage in an article or book chapter that provides only general information or that has no specific ideas you want to quote or paraphrase. Even when you summarize information in a research essay, it will be important for you to identify the speaker and offer a parenthetical citation.

Quotation: This form is best when you want to borrow the **exact language** of the writer in your text. When you quote a passage you should select the passage because the author's phrasing is difficult to paraphrase or the idea is phrased in an especially effective manner. **A mistake that novice writers often make is using too many quotations.** Select quotes carefully and use them only when they are absolutely necessary to accentuate *your* writing. *Quotes should add to your writing not replace it.* Be sure to include a **signal phrase**, with **speaker** and **context**, and the appropriate parenthetical information.

3. **Write down all of the relevant bibliographical information** (author's name, title of books or periodicals, edition, publishing info, dates, pages numbers, etc.) for each source that you plan to use and develop an indexing system to track which source connects to what piece of information. **Record this info as you read and research.** **Don't wait until the end of your research to gather this bibliographic information.**

Note-Taking Practice

<u>Source Material</u>	<u>Quote</u>
According to the APA, 50 percent of teens ages thirteen to seventeen indicated that the pandemic has severely disrupted their plans for the future and 51 percent reported that the pandemic had made planning for the future feel impossible.	
	<i>Paraphrase</i>
	<i>Summary</i>

