

Common Text Workshop - Fall 2012
Best Practices for Research Assignments

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After discussing with your group research assignments and prompts that have worked in the past, or imagining ones that you would like to try, please pick two to share with the larger group. Fill in the tables below, one for each assignment, and take as much space as you need; the table will expand as you fill it with text.

Assignment 1: Field Notes for Qualitative Research

Goal of the assignment:

Introducing students to qualitative research

Honing observation skills, being an objective observer

Clarifying distinctions between objective and subjective observation

Putting those distinctions to work for good writing

Connection to College Writing Learning Outcomes:

Students will explore research process, esp. finding, assessing and analyzing **primary** sources of information

Students will write texts that integrate their own thoughts with the words and ideas of others, practicing documentation skills and entering into the academic conversation.

Required steps:

Class conversation linking to an ongoing discussion about objective and subjective voices

Link those concepts to concrete examples by asking students to do an observation exercise on their own

Conduct an observation of a place that had significance – something familiar, but observing it from the researcher’s stance

During observation, students write a dual entry journal, splitting sensory input on the left and impressions on the right

Give feedback on precision and accuracy and detail in the objective data gathered

When students write papers, they integrate their observations from the field

Potential challenges or other considerations:

We like that this helps them stay narrow and focused, and to limit their topic

Assignment 2: Instant Polling: Moving from Data to Thesis

Goal of the assignment:

Helping students get to a thesis from an abundance of data and organize “raw” information

Demystifying the process of accounting for contradictory data, putting contradictory info. into conversation with one another

Connection to College Writing II Learning Outcomes:

Students will explore research process, esp. finding, assessing and analyzing **primary** sources of information

Students will write texts that integrate their own thoughts with the words and ideas of others, practicing documentation skills and entering into the academic conversation.

Required steps:

In-class exercise: quick written response to a series of prompts about how they would respond— whether or not they would intervene--in a variety of simple social situations (e.g., if you saw someone smoking on the subway, what would you do?) and why they decided the way they do.

In discussion, the class develops a tally and elaborates the body of possible responses.

Class comes up with a group thesis—this gives them practice the skill of negotiating potentially contradictory information!

Potential challenges or other considerations:

Possibly use Poll Anywhere (on cell phones in class) or Survey Monkey (done in advance) to compile the information?