ACADEMIC SKILLS

Week Two

Project Development Seminar I: Topics

Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

Structure

Devising Research Topics

Formulating Research Questions

Targeted Learning Outcome

An academically viable and manageable research topic

Who came up with your previous essay topics?

Have you ever had to develop your own topics?

How did you go about doing this?

Getting Started …

Before starting the research and writing process, it is imperative we have a good sense of what we are doing … and by extension not doing

As a provisional starting point, we should be striving to do two things:

1. **Identify the general area we will be researching and writing on**

2. **Develop a research question relating to that general area.**

Note that at this point, we are not focusing on what we will *argue*, how we will organize our paper, and how we will present our ideas

And, of course, this is only provisional – the processes of researching and writing will take us in different directions, so things can change!!

Research Topics

Once we have identified a potential research topic, we need to be fairly confident that it is a) manageable and b) topic-relevant

We may fear our topic is too narrow to produce the required paper, but this is usually wrong: normally we will need to tighten our focus

NB: For a 6-8 paper, we really need to think quite small and zoom-in on a small number of case-studies that we will analyze in detail

We may fear our topic has already been examined by others: this is usually not a problem – there is usually something new to say about it

One thing we need to bear in mind is that we don't have a huge amount of time to research or write, and we must work with limited resources

Think about three questions you would like to know the answer to …

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1. To what extent does the US Government influence the content of American television?

2. How did *The Goonies* (1985) become a fondly remembered cult film?

3. Does my cat Gizmo really love me?

How realistically could I be expected to answer these questions (in four months or indeed ever)?

Research Questions

The relationship between the Research Topic and the Research Question is a little bit like the chicken and the egg: which comes first?

In reality, this relationship need not be linear: it is not always the case we identify a topic and then afterwards formulate a research question

Sometimes, we may start with a research question, and then tailor our research topic to help us best answer this already-formulated question

Other times, we may be interested in a topic, but only after we research it more closely do we discover the basis for our research question

Either way, by formulating a research question – even a "reverse engineered one" – we have a framework in which to imbed our analysis

General Topics

What general topics have you been thinking about for this essay?

Does anyone see any challenges with these topics?

Does anyone find any of these topics interesting?

If so why? If not why not?

What do folks think about this general feedback?

Take-Aways

When formulating a research project we need to identify a general area that you are interested in learning more about: our research topic

It is also essential that we zoom in on a manageable part of that general topic so as to formulate a research question we will seek to answer

It is essential we formulate a research question we can realistically expect to answer given the parameters of the assessment in question

At all times, we need to think pragmatically, avoiding topics/questions that are too broad or too narrow, or ones we cannot ever really answer

We should treat the topic/question as provisional, as our findings may ultimately lead us to revise, refocus, or streamline our topic/question

Next Time

Date: 06.10.222

Instructor: Sarka

Topic: Project Development Seminar 2: Primary Sources

Outcome: Identifying and securing suitable primary sources

Preparation: What are the primary sources required for the topic of your interest and how and where would you secure them?