First Writing Assignment: Research Question  
MMW 122, Winter 2015

Length: 2 pages (Research Question Worksheet)  
Due: Week 3, in section

This quarter you will write an eight- to ten-page research paper on a topic relevant to the period 1750 to “the present.” Your initial task will be to conduct preliminary research in secondary sources on a topic of your choosing and to develop one or two open-ended research questions based on that research.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS:  
From Interests to Topic: Find a topic that interests you and that is grounded in academic scholarship. There are many resources you can consult to find a topic to explore:
   - The sections on conducting research in Andrea Lunsford’s, Easy Writer (pages 17-19 and 176-197)  
   - The “MMW 122 Research Areas” handout posted on the MMW and/or course website  
   - The “Surviving a Research Paper: A 13-step process” handout on the MMW website  
   - The course syllabus  
   - Assigned course readings (see especially bibliographies and textbook headings)  
   - MMW library reserves (at Geisel)  
   - Books and journal articles in the stacks at Geisel  
   - The MMW Library Guides for MMW 14/122  
   - Carts next to the MMW high-use table in the Geisel Library reference area, where you will find MMW-specific reference works  
   - Your professor and your TA

Limitations: You may write on almost anything as long as it is related to the 1750 to “the present” time period with the following limitations:
   1. Forbidden questions related to the atomic bomb or Holocaust.  
   2. Hypothetical, policy, or other “should/would” questions that involve speculation or forecasting. Your questions should be answered with empirical, historically-grounded evidence.  
   3. Recent topics that are not grounded in peer-reviewed scholarship  
   4. US-related topics. If you choose to write about the US, your paper must meet the following criteria:  
      a. You may write on US and the World – also the paper involves the US, the main action takes place in another geographical region outside US borders.  
      b. If the main action takes place in the United States, the paper must focus on only first peoples, non-citizens, or forced/voluntary immigrants.  

Please see the “MMW 122 Research Areas Handout” for more information on topic limitations and talk to your TA.

From Topic to Problem:  
Once you’ve settled on a topic, learn more about it: READ, READ, READ. There is no other way to develop a research question than to read as much as you can about your topic. As you read, pay attention to what you find really interesting, what is important to you, what you would like to
understand better, and what you think others will find important or that they should know or understand better. In particular, observe and note gaps, inconsistencies, contradictions, complexities, curiosities, and surprises: it is often the things that don’t seem to make sense that lead to the best research. Writers call these conceptual problems or “mental itches” that you will scratch with more research.

Record your observations, making sure that you also note the sources in which you found them. Photocopy or print out any material that you plan to cite, include the title and copyright pages, and highlight the passages/information that you cite. This demonstrates where the cited material comes from. Which sources are appropriate and which are unacceptable? For MMW guidelines see “Sources for Research Papers,” “Criteria for Evaluating On-line Sources,” and “Journals vs. Magazines,” all of which are posted on the MMW website.

From Problem to Question: Formulate one or two (maximum) research questions. What problem has your observations identified? What question do you have about that problem? Your research question(s) should be what MMW calls (a) Level-3 research question(s): open-ended questions that can be addressed, but not answered definitively, with scholarly research. Level-3 questions have more than one plausible answer grounded in scholarship.

Recording your process: In your own words, record (type) both your observations and your questions on the Research Question Worksheet. Make sure that your observations are in your own words; you must not include verbatim quotations or paraphrases of a scholar’s statements. These should be your own observations. The Worksheet requires you to identify:

- Your proposed topic
- A conceptual problem (“mental itch”)
- Your observations
- The sources of your observations (authors’ names and source titles) – you will only provide secondary sources in your worksheet
- Your proposed level-three research question(s)

You must type your responses on the Research Question Worksheet. Since it is posted as a Microsoft Word document, you may add boxes as needed for the number of secondary sources you have consulted. For an example, see the “Sample Research Question Worksheet” that is posted on the MMW website.

At the end of this worksheet, you should be able to complete the following statement:

I am studying _____________________ (Topic)
because I want to find out __________________(Question)
in order to help my reader understand ______________(Significance)

What to submit:
On the due date for the first assignment, you must submit all of the following:

_____ Completed (typed) Research Question Worksheets

In the boxes provided, type in your proposed topic, all relevant observations, the sources of your observations, and your proposed research questions
A list of works cited
Record, in correct MLA format, complete citation information for all of the sources listed on your Research Question Worksheet. Attach the list of Works Cited to the back of your completed worksheets.

Photocopies/Printouts
Submit a photocopy or printout of each source that you cite, labelled appropriately (see above). Arrange the photocopies/printouts in the order in which they appear on your list of Works Cited. Clip them together, but do not staple them to your worksheet.

Criteria for Evaluating On-line Sources Sheet (if you propose to use any on-line sources).
Printout of the Grading Rubric that your TA will return to you with their comments.

The First Writing Assignment must be completed and submitted in section during Week Three. The assignment must contain all of the components listed above in order to be considered complete. An assignment that is missing one or more components will be considered late and will not be graded until all of the components have been submitted. If you fail to submit the First Writing Assignment by Week 5, you will fail the course. Do not let this happen!

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