



Three Scenarios: Processes for Conducting Research

Scenario 1

For a research project associated with American literature, Erin’s teacher asks every student to write a research paper around the following question: “What place should 18th century American authors have in schools’ curricula?” Since the class has been reading literature from this period, and she likes it, she writes the following thesis statement about the topic: 18th century American authors should be a part of every school’s curriculum.

She thinks about this for a while and decides to look for information in these categories to prove her thesis: how they influenced later writers, their current cultural importance, and the beauty of the literature. After her teacher shows the class how to tell if an online source is credible, Erin goes to several databases to look for information.

During the next two weeks, Erin goes online at different times and looks for information about her categories. She finds two articles about how 18th century American authors influenced later writers. She also finds several pieces praising the authors of this period. She has a tough time finding anything about the current cultural importance of these authors, so she starts looking for movies, TV shows, or songs that reference these authors. She finds several of these. She looks for quotes from the texts that support her thesis, making notes or highlighting/annotating the texts as she goes. She puts each quote on a note card, making sure to put the general category and citation information on each one.

Once she collects information about all three categories, she writes an argumentative paper to persuade others that 18th century American authors should be a part of every school’s curriculum. For each section, she includes the quotes that support her thesis. She works with a partner, who helps edit her work, checking for spelling and punctuation errors. Then she turns in the finished paper.



Scenario 2

After a unit on *Hamlet*, Ha Mi's teacher gives his students a research project. Their job is to research some aspect of the time period in which Shakespeare wrote, such as the culture, the language, or the politics of the time.

Ha Mi thinks about this and decides to research the culture. She has a conference with her teacher to discuss the topic. They talk about what aspects of culture might be useful to include. Together, they decide that Ha Mi should look for information on clothing, manners, music, and other literature. Ha Mi makes these the four categories for her research and writes the following thesis statement: Clothing, manners, music, and literature were all important parts of Elizabethan culture.

Ha Mi's class goes to the library to find information. To conduct her search, she looks online and in the library for information on each topic. She finds several informational texts that explain aspects of culture. She identifies several credible sources online, and checks out books from the library. Over the next week, she also finds a History Channel video on Shakespeare and watches that. In each source, she looks through for information about the four categories of culture she has identified, making notes and annotating as she goes. She collects all her information in a research folder, creating one section for each area. She copies relevant quotes from each source into her folder.

Once she finds information for each category, she finishes her project. She writes an essay that describes the culture of Shakespeare's time by explaining what she found about each of these four categories. She begins with her thesis statement and develops an essay in four sections—one section for each of her four categories. In each one, she explains what each source said about that topic, inserting quotes from the articles and books she read that match that area. Once she is done, she writes an introduction and a conclusion to her essay.

Scenario 3

Marisol’s English class has recently read “The Influencing Machine,” by Brooke Gladstone. Given the students’ interest and heated discussions, her teacher has decided the class should research the topic of advertising. After watching some ads and reading an article about advertising, Marisol discusses advertising with a small group. Together, they list things they’re interested in and areas about advertising they could explore. Marisol picks three areas of investigation she’d really like to know more about—advertising to children, the effectiveness of advertising, and the effect of advertising on girls’ self image—and reads a few short articles she finds online over the weekend.

On Monday in class, her group discusses all of their ideas and initial findings. Marisol talks about an article on cereal advertising that she found fascinating. She also discusses how much her younger sister loves to watch TV. One of her classmates shares information he encountered about possible restrictions on advertising. Marisol decides to explore restrictions on advertising during television programs for preschoolers. She brings this area of investigation to the entire class, and everyone helps her brainstorm questions that could be asked about it. Marisol selects the ones that seem the most useful to guide her initial inquiry and to help expand her knowledge of the area.

With these questions, she looks for credible, rich sources in several different databases, recording notes and thoughts as she reads. She finds some answers and comes up with new questions that she wants to explore. As her understanding deepens, she frames her questions into four categories: current laws about TV ads, cognitive development of preschoolers, TV viewing habits of preschoolers, and advertising strategies of various companies. She discusses and refines her research frame with her teacher and peers.

Over the next week, Marisol continues her search along these four paths of inquiry. Once she feels that the information she has gathered has given her a good understanding of the area, she writes a few paragraphs to consolidate and explain her findings. Then she meets with her team again. Together, they review her research and discuss whether she has enough information at this point to answer all her questions. As they talk, they realize that her frame left out the perspective of parents, which now seems important. So, Marisol develops a new list of questions about parental habits and responsibilities, and looks for and analyzes additional information to answer them.

Excited about her deepening understanding of advertising, she discusses what she’s learned with her parents. During the discussion, she realizes she’s developing a perspective on the issue based on her research. She then writes an essay explaining what she now thinks about restrictions on advertising to preschoolers, using the evidence she has collected.