

Current Controversies ELA 20 Research Process

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Current Controversies

ELA 20 Research Process

This assignment aims to build student skills in targeted aspects of the research process. Students were asked to narrow a research topic to a question they would be interested in exploring on a subject that has opposing viewpoints. Current controversial topics were chosen for this project to demonstrate to the students the advantages of using databases and print resources which were in the school library collection.

The pros and cons of contentious subjects are given in books from series like *Opposing Viewpoints*, *Current Controversies* and *At Issue* by Greenhaven Press and *Contemporary Issues* and *Teen Issues* by Lucent Books. The Saunders Book Company in its 2010 Young Adult Book Library Catalogue has an excellent chart on page 13 summarizing the content of these books and full lists of available titles on the following pages. A downloadable copy is available at <http://librarybooks.com/>.

Students were required to use three database articles and one of these books for this project. They were shown how to use the databases, Infotrac and Proquest, to find articles to inform themselves on their question. As they read the articles and books, they tabulated arguments on both sides of their question on the graphic organizer provided. Students cited the database articles using the tools within the database and used the online citation generator found at <http://citationmachine.net/> for the books. Once students chose which side of the issue they wanted to support, they wrote a persuasive paragraph. They presented their research findings and opinions to their peers in small groups and evaluated each other using a rubric. The teacher and teacher librarian evaluated the organizer and paragraph on a separate rubric.

Students responded positively to this assignment and received practice in the following skills:

1. Choosing and narrowing a topic
2. Searching the databases for information
3. Using a graphic organizer to record and organize information
4. Writing a persuasive paragraph
5. Evaluating peer work
6. Citing sources

Choosing a topic

Choose a topic from the list of current controversial topics below:

Harassment	Sexually Transmitted Diseases	Child sexual abuse
Slavery today	Capital Punishment	Sexual Values
Euthanasia	Animal Rights	Civil Liberties
Human Rights	Male/Female Roles	Hate Crimes
Crime	Violence in the Media	Censorship
Abortion	Developing Nations	Global Warming
Teen Suicide	Anorexia	Drunk Driving
The Middle East	Gangs	Juvenile Crime
Teenage Pregnancy	Tobacco and Smoking	War

Narrowing the topic

Research is more than just reading an article or book and copying facts from someone else. You must narrow your topic to a manageable research question. You need to find and combine information from a variety of sources to support your own stand on an issue. This is an active process involving several steps.

The topics listed above are only a starting point. They are considered broad topics and need to be narrowed to a more manageable focus. Consider the following examples in which the same broad topic is narrowed to three very different focused options:

Vehicles	Vehicles	Vehicles
Family SUV's	Classic Cars	Sports Cars
Honda CRV	Ford Model T	Corvette

Use the general topic you chose to complete the narrowing exercise that follows.

Using a general to specific triangle to narrow a topic

(from *Research project calculator: Narrowing a topic* http://rpc.elm4you.org/docs/step1/narrowing_a_topic.doc)

Your goal in a research project is to become an expert in a particular topic. If your topic is too broad, finding and interpreting information about the topic like preparing to write an entire book! Choosing a narrower topic limits your provides a clear focus for your process. If you know a little about the specific topic, try generating research questions.

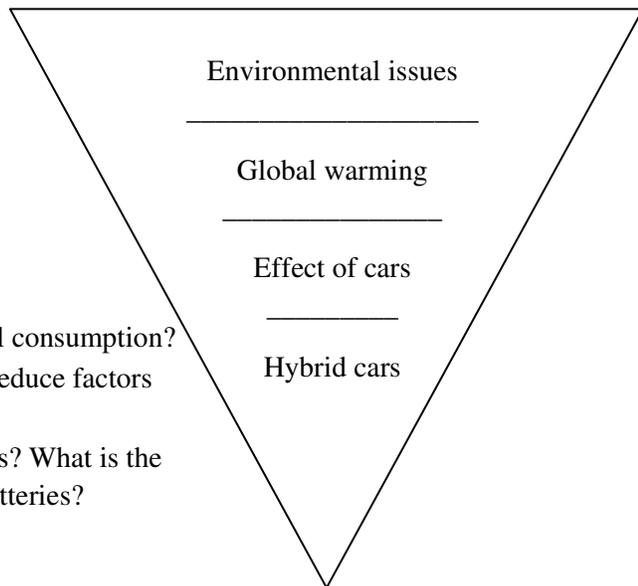
Example:

General: Environment

Narrower: Global warming

Narrower: Effect of automobiles

Specific: Hybrid cars



Possible research questions:

- How does hybrid technology reduce fuel consumption?
- Does driving a hybrid car significantly reduce factors that lead to global warming?
- What is the battery life of the hybrid cars? What is the environmental effect of disposing the batteries?

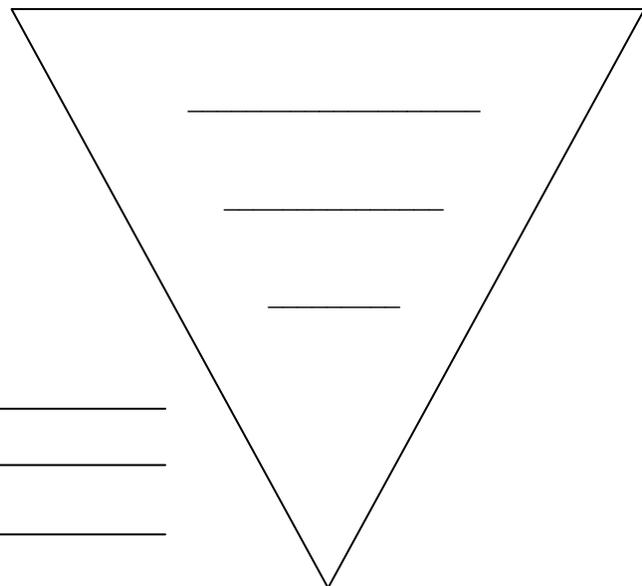
You try:

General:

Narrower:

Narrower:

Specific:



Possible research questions:

Pro and Con Chart and Persuasive Paragraph Rubric

Persuasive paragraph rubric. (2004, February 28). Retrieved from

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/elab10/unit1/inequality/lesson5/persuasiverubric.html

Level 4	is clear, logical
The chart	has 7 or 8 strong arguments for each side of the issue
The paragraph	has a strong, clear topic sentence stating the writer's opinion has 3 or more supporting details with elaboration. includes a concluding statement that restates the author's point of view has few, if any errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation
Level 3	is clear
The Chart	has 5 or 6 arguments for each side of the issue
The paragraph	has a clear topic sentence stating the writer's opinion has 3 or more supporting details, some with elaboration. includes a concluding statement that restates the author's point of view has few errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation
Level 2	may be hard to follow
The Chart	has 3 or 4 arguments for each side of the issue
The paragraph	has a topic sentence that does not clearly state the author's opinion has less than 3 or more supporting details may not have a concluding statement has several errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation
Level 1	is confusing
The Chart	has 1 or 2 arguments for each side of the issue
The paragraph	ambiguous statement of opinion may not include a topic sentence has 2 or more supporting details may not have a concluding statement has many errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation

Peer Evaluation Rubric: Pros and Cons of an Issue

Name: _____

Name of student you are evaluating: _____ Total _____/16

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Information	All information presented was clear, accurate and thorough. Seven or eight points were made on both sides of the issue. The student explained all points well.	Most information presented was clear, accurate and thorough. Five or six points were made on both sides of the issue. The student adequately explained most of the points.	Most information presented was clear and accurate, but was not usually thorough. Three or four points were made on both sides of the issue. The student tried to explain some of the points.	Information had several inaccuracies OR was usually not clear. One or two points were made on both sides of the issue. Explanation was brief or not done.
Use of Facts	Examples or facts were given to support each point.	Most points were adequately supported with facts or examples.	Only some points were supported with facts and examples.	Points were not supported by facts and examples.
Presentation Style	The student consistently used eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	The student usually used eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	The student sometimes used eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	The student had a presentation style that did not keep the attention of the audience.
Understanding of Topic	The student clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented his/her information forcefully and convincingly.	The student clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information with ease.	The student seemed to understand the main points of the topic and presented those with ease.	The student did not show an adequate understanding of the topic.

Something interesting I learned from this presentation:

One question I have from hearing this presentation:

Resources

Bender, D. (publisher) *Contemporary Issues Companion* series. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

Bender, D. (publisher) *Opposing Viewpoints Digests* series. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

Contemporary Issues series. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, Inc.

Nasso, C. (publisher) *Current Controversies* series. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

Nasso, C. (publisher) *At Issue* series. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

Persuasive paragraph rubric. (2004, February 28). Retrieved from

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/elab10/unit1/inequality/lesson5/persuasiverubric.html.

Retrieved December 14, 2009.

Project CRISS. (2007) *CRISS Cornerstones: Self-directed follow-up for teacher teams*. CD ROM.

Research project calculator: Narrowing a topic. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://rpc.elm4you.org/docs/step1/narrowing_a_topic.doc. Retrieved December 14, 2009.

Teen Issues Lucent Overview series. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, Inc.

Research questions developed by this group of grade 11 students:

Are youth laws are too lenient?

Are drinking and driving laws for teenagers strict enough?

Is white supremacy morally correct?

Does cyber bullying have more of an effect on suicide than regular bullying?

Is depression the main cause of teen suicide?

Is teen violence encouraged by rap music?

Are the punishments a large enough deterrent to stop Canadian teens from drinking and driving?

Do the media encourage violent behaviour in children?

Are gangs a positive influence in society?

Are governments failing in their efforts in the war against terrorism?

Can teen suicide or depression be avoided?

Do drinking and driving laws make the roads safer?

Are women discriminated against in the work place?

Are car accidents are more fatal when alcohol is involved?

Is teen pregnancy always a negative thing?

Will women ever have equal rights? Spousal violence

Is capital punishment a good deterrent to crime?

Are carbon gases warming the Earth's atmosphere something we should fear?

Is teen pregnancy wrong?

Should smoking be banned for good?

