**Project One: The Inquiry Memo**

(Estimated Reading Time: 6 minutes, 36 seconds)

In this assignment, you’ll introduce the question or problem you want to research this semester, providing context and making the case for why this inquiry is important. The inquiry memo sets in motion the semester-long arc of a research project, so you should engage this crucial first step drawing not only on what you already know but with a genuine openness in what you want to learn, why you want to learn it, and why that learning will matter for you or others. Your final research project will document this inquiry as a research project that introduces and draws upon primary research methods (e.g., archival work, interviews, surveys, fieldwork etc.) and secondary research sources (published studies, scholarly articles, research-based journalism, and more).

For this memo, then, we’ll begin our discussion of distinctions between primary and secondary research, noticing the ways research-based academic writing is sponsored at Virginia Tech. Your second and third projects will therefore build upon the work you do here.

**Writing the Memo**

The purpose of this research project is to pose a question or problem (or a series of questions or problems), to engage the question or problem through sustained inquiry, and to develop a case for why this study matters, to whom it matters, and, if applicable, what action steps should be taken for this work to make a material difference in the world, whether by changing hearts and minds (persuasively, compelling agreement or achieving consensus) or by expressing a realistic action plan. To be successful and effective, the sustained research project should remind readers that it has a handle on the "So what?" question. You could think of this as a research project whose goal is to argue for something, although if you do so, it will be very important to differentiate between pro-con, debate-style argumentation and forms of argument that are more cooperative. This work should take its focus from our course theme or from the general set of issues we have turned our attention to as a class. In this inquiry memo, then, you will propose the idea and/or plan that you will discuss in your research paper, including any preliminary research you will need to inquire into this issue.

**In your inquiry memo, be careful to address foundational rhetorical considerations of audience and purpose.**

**Audience**—Effective proposals discuss openly who the audience is for the sustained research project. This is challenging, because you also have an audience for this memo--the more local, immediate audience of your professor and your peers. As you write, consider: what will the audience's attitudes be? How much do they know about the issue? How much do they need to know? Keep in mind that as you describe your project, make sure you define key terms, develop in detail any references to specialized language (e.g., a term or phrase used in one field but not well understood in another field), emphasize the need and benefits of your question or problem, and explain why you are choosing the question(s) or problem(s) that you are.

**Purpose**—In reviewing your memo, I want to make sure that you've designed a project that is viable and valuable and that you can complete it successfully in the time requested. I also need to decide what, if any, help I need to provide to insure the project's success.

As a result, your memo needs to persuade me that

* your topic is important enough to justify a research project
* you can benefit from the research project in the context of this course
* your topic is broad enough to justify creating a research project
* your topic is narrow enough to allow you to research it in-depth in the time allotted (i.e. you haven't taken on too much)
* you have a clear plan for accomplishing your research and producing a well-developed project

**Required Sections**

* **Introduction**
  + What topic do you want to explore for the final research project?
  + What about that topic interests you?
  + Why would this topic matter to people beyond yourself? (think rhetorically here, about your audience for the final research paper)
  + Is there any background information you might need to include?
* **Research Question(s)**
  + What question(s) will guide your research? Question(s) should strive to be specific and clear; eventually, as you work, answers to your question(s) will thesis-like in your final research project.
* **Resources and Research Method**
  + How will you gather information, both primary and secondary, to help others understand your position?
  + What resources are available at Virginia Tech to support research writing?
* As you consider possible primary and secondary sources, for **primary** sources, you should locate “experts” in your research areas; include these experts’ contact information and explain why each expert would be an appropriate source of information for your research paper.
* For **secondary** sources, locate and present sources you are thinking of using: newspaper articles, research-based journal or magazine articles, websites, books, etc. I would use the databases available at our library (which are available online mostly via Discovery Search), and make sure your sources are all scholarly and relevant to your work.
* For this memo, just be thinking about what sources they will be, and explain briefly how the sources you’ve found might contribute to the research paper. You do not need to have found research at this point; this is what we will begin to do for our second major assignment.
* **Conclusion**
  + Reiterate the main goals of your research project and the main points of your memo. The authorization, when granted, gives you permission to do the work and establishes the contractual agreement (i.e. you need to ask for my approval of your proposed topic).

**Requirements**

* Your memo will be 3-4 pages, double-spaced, in a 12 -point Times New Roman typeface, with one-inch margins, in a professional memo format.
* Include all of the above sections that I have discussed, with **appropriate headings** listed, meeting all of the guidelines discussed throughout this handout.
* I \*must\* approve your memo before you can continue with the research project. This memo should outline your semester project in sufficient enough detail for me to make a decision about whether or not your project meets the course goals and is feasible within the time frame given.