

PHYS 280 Writing Lab 4
Monday 2/17/2020

Extra Credit Essays (Optional)

2 extra credit responses allowed (worth 2% each)

Approved events – Sign in for attendance

[Overview](#) available here

Prompts for approved events available on [Writing Assignments](#) page

Approved Events Coming Up

- **Writer's Workshop Event: Revising for Structure and Argument**

Thursday, 2-27 from 4:00-5:00 pm in Lincoln Hall Rm. 1020. Participants are encouraged to bring a draft with them. ([more information](#))

- **Radiation Event: Keynote lecture on The Great Chernobyl Acceleration (nuclear-accident radiation compared to aerial bomb-testing radiation) by Kate Brown, Professor at MIT**

Thursday 2/27: 5:30 pm at KAM ([more information](#))

Research Paper Sources

Research Paper Schedule is designed to get you researching/notetaking just before Spring Break. Researching/notetaking can begin once your RPP receives a PASS.

- For RPPv1: 3-5 high-quality sources, minimum (may not be final sources, but will demonstrate your ability to find relevant, high-quality sources)
- RP final version: 6 carefully chosen, high-quality sources, minimum, with
 - 1 book, book chapter, or peer-reviewed article (books should be from academic or other high-quality press – check with TA if in doubt)
 - no more than 2 assigned readings
 - no more than 2 articles from a high-quality newspapers / periodicals (e.g., *New York Times*, *Washington Post*)
 - no course slides
- Web Sources: Only approved [online documents from course list](#) – ask TA to approve any exceptions

Identifying Strong Research Questions

In each case: Is this a strong or weak research question? Why? How would you improve it?

Example 1

Should the US be concerned about China?

Example 2

How has Turkey's decision to buy the \$400 missile defense system changed NATO's alliance structure?

Example 3

What factors impacted the Republic of Korea's decision to not develop nuclear weapons despite the DPRK's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development?

Crafting Strong Research Questions

- **Clear:** Enables readers to immediately “understand what you are asking by providing enough specifics that readers get its purpose without additional explanation” (qualities associated with clarity: relatively brief, straightforward, jargon-free, self-contained/with context and parameters/limits made apparent)
- **Complex:** Not answerable with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. “Requires synthesis and analysis of ideas and sources *prior to* composing an answer.”
- **Arguable:** “Suggests potential answers that are open to debate” rather than likely to be “accepted facts”
- **Focused & Interesting:** Enters into an ongoing conversation. Addresses an identifiable problem and offers to contribute an *interesting* piece to that puzzle (for a given audience already engaged in investigating and defining that problem)

also

- **Practical:** Able to be investigated and answered using (1) the resources at your disposal during (2) the time available for research and (3) the space allotted for sharing it
- **Researchable:** Is not a rapidly evolving question, where current events could render your investigation obsolete or irrelevant (the goal is to produce genuinely useful knowledge)

Sources: GMU Writing Center, Johnson Grad College Fellowship Tips

from *The Craft of Research*

Ch 3 From Topics to Questions (*one method for developing a research question*)

1. State your topic (*what you are writing about*)

I am investigating [topic]. e.g., I am investigating the Republic of Korea's decision to not develop nuclear weapons.

1. Add a question (*what you don't know about it*)

I am investigating [topic] because I want to find out who/what/where/when/whether/why/how [something you don't understand or know about your topic]. e.g., I am investigating the Republic of Korea's decision to not develop nuclear weapons, because I want understand why they have refrained from doing so despite the DPRK's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development.

1. Motivate your question (*what you want your reader to know about it--your rationale*)

I am investigating [topic] because I want to find out [who/what/where/when/whether/why/how] [something you don't understand or know about the topic], in order to help my reader understand [a larger question that touches on issues important to your field that your readers will care about]. e.g., I am investigating the Republic of Korea's decision to not develop nuclear weapons, because I want to understand why they have refrained from doing so despite the DPRK's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development, in order to help readers understand how the Republic of Korea and its allies might respond to nuclear threat on the Korean peninsula and, ultimately, in North East Asia.

from *The Craft of Research*

Ch 3 From Topics to Questions (*one method for testing a research question for interest/significance*)

Question or Problem?

“Some questions raise problems; others do not. A question raises a problem if not answering it keeps us from knowing something more important than its answer. For example, if we cannot answer the question Are there ultimate particles? we cannot know something even more important: the nature of physical existence. On the other hand, a question does not raise a problem if not answering it has no apparent consequences.

For example, Was Abraham Lincoln’s right thumb longer than his nose? We cannot think of what would we gain by knowing. At least at the moment.”

Test your final research question for interest to readers / significance to a field of inquiry -- aka *So what?*

Does answering your question help us to know something more important than its answer? That is, something about a larger context in which you have framed the question?