

Media Project 2 (MP2): Looking Out

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Learning Outcomes

- Develop, explore, and refine a research question related to MP1
- Understand and practice the genres of the conference presentation and research paper
- Develop a compelling PowerPoint or Google Slides presentation with appropriate visuals for your audience
- Understand and practice the basics of APA formatting
- Demonstrate a basic facility with using keyword searches to find relevant, high-quality sources on IUCAT, article databases, the web, and other online media
- Understand and practice SIFT and other habits of online fact-checking and source evaluation
- Practice the key moves of academic writing: summary, synthesis, posing a research question, placing one's own ideas into a larger context (i.e., "they say/I say"), complicating and complexifying others' ideas, etc.
- Explore a challenging question related to a relevant social, cultural, or political issue
- Practice giving a multimodal academic presentation to an audience of peers

Your Situation

Each year in April, IU Kokomo hosts its annual [Student Research Symposium](#) to showcase student research projects and to bring the excitement of an academic conference to our home turf. Undergraduate students from across campus submit brief proposals or "abstracts" of no more than 250 words to the conference organizers by mid-March, and presentations are then chosen based on how well the topic fits with the theme, innovation and creativity, and the quality of the research. This year, the SRS organizers have joined forces with [Bind Café](#) in downtown Kokomo to host an event unlike any other that has been held in recent memory. To honor and reflect on the social upheaval of mid-2020, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and others, as well as the protests that followed, this year's SRS attempts to bring participants together around the important theme of student activism and political engagement among college students. The working title for the 2021 SRS is "Getting it Down, Writing it Up, Making a Difference: Research for the Common Good" because the organizers want to highlight research projects that involve social, cultural, and political issues of interest to today's college students based on recent events nationwide.

Your Genre

As we learned while building MP1, just what people mean by *research* varies widely depending on the discipline, and the same goes for what it means to present a paper at a conference. Even just within the humanities and social sciences, for example, to present a paper (or “give a talk”) could mean anything from simply reading an eight to ten-page double-spaced paper to a more elaborate, interactive presentation with a detailed PowerPoint. In some of the so-called “hard sciences” (biology, chemistry, physics), giving a research presentation might involve developing a poster that graphically represents the results of an experiment or series of experiments.

Given its inclusive focus on all academic disciplines, the SRS has typically invited two types of submissions: traditional research presentations of approximately 20 minutes and poster presentations. This year, however, in keeping with the theme and with recent national events, the SRS organizers have developed a special third category called “Challenging Questions.” Rather than a traditional research paper that attempts to provide a solution or persuade a reader in some way, submissions to the “Challenging Questions” category are exploratory. That is, they pose a challenging social, cultural, or political question, not necessarily to answer it definitively (or even tentatively), but to provide the reader with an overview of the various perspectives surrounding that challenging question. (This is the “they say”-part of the academic conversation that you’ve been reading about.)

For your presentation, you will develop a PowerPoint/Google Slides/Prezi presentation of approximately five slides (no more than ten minutes total) with an accompanying eight- to ten-page exploratory research paper in APA format, which is the preferred format of this particular conference. This will be your submission to the “Challenging Questions” category. Working with your instructor and colleagues in class, over the next several weeks you will learn how to frame up a working research question. You will also begin the process—maybe for the first time in your life—of gathering materials and reading broadly and deeply about a timely question that interests you. As in the run-up to MP1, all of the smaller assignments we do in Canvas or during class time will feed directly into the development of MP2.

Your Audience

Now in its sixth year, the SRS at IU Kokomo has become an event that draws attendees from all over campus and from all disciplines: social scientists mix with public health researchers, historians gab with plant biologists and nursing faculty. (You get the idea.) There are always a lot of faculty on hand, but the event is popular with students, too. Staff also wander in and out of the Kelley Center listening to presentations. Presenters are placed on panels of two or three others with similar topics in 60-minute sessions; since sessions run concurrently, you can safely assume that the folks who show up for your session are genuinely interested in your topic because they chose to be there.

What can be said about such an audience? Working with your instructor and other colleagues in class, you will come up key features of the reader you are addressing, which will also depend to some degree on the kind of “challenging question” your research seeks to explore.

Your Purpose

All good research presentations begin *not* with a topic, per se, but with a question, a narrow-enough question that it can be fully explored within the time constraints and page limits of the conference presentation. You wouldn’t necessarily want to try to answer a question like, “What is to blame for the obesity epidemic in America?”, for example, or “What is the relationship between race and policing in America?” While these questions are certainly relevant and timely and worthwhile, to really get at questions of this magnitude would require *at least* a book-length project. If you’re interested in questions related to the obesity epidemic and student health and well-being, you might try posing a question more like this one: “How can campus dining do a better job of promoting first-year student health?” Or this one: “How has COVID-19 changed college students’ views on health and fitness?” Note that these are also relevant and important questions, but they are much more manageable and can be explore (or at least addressed) in the span of a 10-minute presentation (or roughly eight-page exploratory research paper).

Let’s say you are more interested in social or cultural questions. Here are a few examples of questions that could be starting points: “How has Tinder influenced the ‘hook up’ culture at US colleges and universities?” or “What are colleges and universities around the country doing to increase diversity on their campuses?” In the earliest stages of your research process, your research questions are more properly known as *working* research questions because they provide both a starting point and a framework for how your research will unfold. You may choose a WRQ that is related in some way to your focus for MP1, but you don’t necessarily have to. Take a moment to re-read the sample WRQs from earlier in this paragraph: do you see how these questions could serve to set up a research project and even a tentative agenda for how to do that research? They give the researcher a clear sense of what they are trying to explore, complicate, complexify, and/or report on. Your instructor will arrange a series of in-class and online activities over the next several weeks to help you brainstorm ideas, develop a working research question, and start the process of gathering high-quality information.

One more thing: it’s important to note one more time that *this is not an argumentative paper*. In other words, your primary goal is not to prove a point or demonstrate the results of an experiment or persuade an audience to see things your way. (That’s what the other two categories of presentations at SRS are for.) Rather, you should think of yourself as a kind of intellectual guide, taking the reader on a journey into the complexities of your “challenging question.”

Possible Topics

Again, the working title for the 2021 SRS is “Getting it Down, Writing it Up, Making a Difference: Research for the Common Good” because the organizers want to highlight research projects that involve social, cultural, and political issues of interest to today’s college students based on recent events nationwide. For the “Challenging Questions” category, the organizers are especially interested in research presentations that explore questions of social, cultural, or political interest to today’s college students and college-aged people (18 to 25 years old). For example, on the call for papers (or “CFP”), they’ve listed the following topics as potential ideas to get presenters thinking about possible topics and research questions explore. Here’s the list from the CFP:

- Student finances and debt
- Student health and sexuality
- Mental health
- Ability and disability
- Political identity and activity
- The value of general education
- Relationships and dating
- Volunteerism
- Alcohol
- Sexual misconduct and violence
- Sports programs
- Social life (including fraternities and sororities)
- Work life
- Academic challenges
- Spiritual life
- Multitasking, study habits, academic challenges for first-year students
- Cheating and academic dishonesty

While they are open to a variety of topics, it is important to the conference organizers—and your writing instructors!—that each researcher develop a topic and RQ with three essential characteristics: (1) they feel passionate and personally invested in the topic, (2) the topic is sufficiently narrow that it can be adequately explored in a brief exploratory research paper (around eight to ten pages) and PowerPoint (five slides for ten minutes), and (3) it will be of interest to other college students because it is connected to a larger social, cultural, or political issue. Again, while you may certainly choose to “recycle” and expand your focus or topic from MP1, you certainly don’t have to. Be sure to talk to your instructor about possibilities. Also, as you and your colleagues in class discuss possible topics, you may want to join with 3-4 other students to form panels on similar topics for the conference.

What Do People Mean by “Research”?

As we have discussed in class, the word *research* means different things to different people. A physicist might imagine shooting electrons through a cathode ray tube to study the way particles behave. An economist might gather census data and perform statistical analysis on investment decisions. An anthropologist would think of research as collecting data from careful observations of human behavior in everyday life. Historians or literary scholars will visit archives and scholarly databases for much of their research.

For the “Challenging Questions” category, however, research means finding relevant, high-quality, “key” sources to help you explore a larger cultural, social, or political issue. You might think of it as compiling a “greatest hits” list of sources that provide an array of perspectives, insights, and opinions on a particular challenging question. Your instructor will be an invaluable resource as you refine and develop your research question.

Your Criteria

There are two parts to MP2: the exploratory research paper in APA format (approximately eight pages with at least six sources) and the five-slide (no more than ten minutes!) PowerPoint presentation that accompanies it. You will also, of course, present your research as part of the “Challenging Questions” presentation at the 2021 SRS and you should be prepared to take questions from the audience (don’t worry: we will practice this in class and/or via Zoom).

Here are some general guidelines for how your “Challenging Questions” project will be evaluated and graded:

- Think carefully about the choice of challenging question you want to explore. You want to choose a topic that genuinely interests you because that way you will be more likely to remain interested in the topic over time.
- Also think about scope. Don’t pick a “book-length” project for your WRQ!

Supporting Assignments

To help you prepare your submission to the “Challenging Questions” research showcase of the 2021 SRS, your instructor will guide you and the rest of your colleagues through several in-class activities (ICAs), in-class writing projects (ICWs), required course readings, and in-class (or online) discussions (Canvas). Everything we do in class for the next six weeks will directly inform and impact the building of your MP2. To help brainstorm and workshop your working research question, research your challenging question, and draft and workshop your materials, your instructor will assign the following smaller assignments:

- 25 points = image analysis (ICW/ICA)
- 25 points = problematic media/framing analysis (ICW)
- 25 points = mapping out your challenging question (ICW/ICA)
- 25 points = finding, reading, and writing about high-quality sources (ICW/ICA)
- 25 points = midway research check-in (ICA)

- 25 points = full draft* of MP2 (Canvas)
- 100 points = MP2 (Canvas)

= 250 points total

Accessibility

As digital media like podcasts, websites, apps, social media, and other online texts have become essential to how we learn, play, work, and communicate, experts continue to focus on building accessible and inclusive media environments for all people, regardless of disability. Indiana University is [committed to accessibility](#), as are the organizers of the Student Research Symposium. With the help of your instructor, you will learn more about what accessibility means and how to ensure that all of the documents you produce are fully accessible. For a research presentation with a visual component, [accessibility typically means](#) making sure that you attach a clean transcript of your research paper (or “talk”) and that you make your slides and other visuals available to all participants so they can use screen readers if needed. Accessibility is yet another element of audience consideration of which rhetoricians and writers should always be aware. Your instructor will help guide your choices as you plan and develop MP1.

Works Consulted

Jackson, Brian. *Teaching Mindful Writers*. Utah State UP, 2020.