

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PAPER

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“Understanding is a kind of ecstasy.” Karl Sagan

“Knowledge is of two kinds: we know a subject ourselves or we know where we can find information upon it” Samuel Johnson

The Assignment:

The research paper will explore some aspect of Brooklyn, for example, a neighborhood, a landmark, a site, a structure, an institution like Brooklyn College. You might prefer to do a survey of, conduct interviews about, or do an oral history of a specific group of people, a neighborhood, a block, a school, a religious institution, etc.

The paper should be a minimum of 7-8 pages of text, exclusive of title page, table of contents, tables (unless you are tabulating the results of *your* research), footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, and any graphics.

Common Types of Student Research Papers:

Student research papers are usually one of three kinds:

- an informative research paper, which presents facts objectively by reviewing all of the available material or the most respected authorities on a subject.
- an investigative research paper, which sets out to answer question or resolve an issue, with no preconception,
- an interpretive or argumentative research paper selects data or evidence to support the writer’s viewpoint or hypothesis.

The Research Process:

The researcher is a detective, discovering and uncovering facts and putting them together in a meaningful way to arrive at the truth. It is an exciting experience if you choose a topic that attracts or intrigues you.

Is there a question, an issue, or an interest you would like to know more about? Do you have an interpretation of a controversy that you would like to work out? Is there something/someone little known or unknown that you think deserves to be known?

Your Audience or Reader:

You are an expert and are writing for an educated reader who is not an expert in your subject, like the other students in this class and the instructor.

Primary and Secondary Sources:

The sources of any research are of two kinds:

- Primary sources involve a first-hand knowledge or experience of the subject. These include surveys you conduct, lab experiments you conduct, the raw data from other people’s experiments and surveys and interviews, field notes, interviews you conducted or listened to on tape, letters, diaries, autobiographies, newspaper, art works, performances you attended, eyewitness accounts, and historical documents.
- Secondary sources are not first-hand, though they may be based on first-hand knowledge. These include the written or oral reports of other people’s activities and ideas, scholarly articles and books, articles about other people’s surveys, lab reports, etc., biographies, reviews, criticism, and novels, plays, and poems (unless your topic is the writer of the novels, plays, or poems).

Your research paper must include primary sources.

(Over)

Possible topics:

A neighborhood

Coney Island, Brooklyn Heights, Redhook, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Flatbush, DUMBO, Weeksville

A building or institution

Erasmus Hall: its history from its founding in 1787 to landmark

Controversy at the Brooklyn Museum

The development of the Brooklyn Academy of Music

Plymouth Church and Its Role in the Abolition Movement

A famous or noteworthy site

Greenwood Cemetery

Prospect Park

Brooklyn Navy Yard

The history of Brooklyn

How Brooklyn came to merge with New York City in 1898

The *Brooklyn Eagle*: voice and spirit of nineteenth century Brooklyn

The *Brooklyn Eagle*'s portrayal of African Americans

The Battle of Brooklyn

The Draft Riot of 1863

The Italian or Jewish or Scandinavian or Irish immigrant in Brooklyn

The early history of Brooklyn as early villages

A structure

The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge

The Brooklyn Bridge as engineering marvel

The roller coaster and Coney Island

Trials, scandals, and controversies

The Beecher-Tilton adultery trial, 1875

Dr. Mary Dixon Jones's trials for manslaughter and libel against the *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1890.

The Maybee murders, 1883

The Atlantic Yard development

Brooklyn College

Student Political Activism in the 1930s

Student response to the Rapp-Coudert Committee

The early years

The basketball scandal

The Chemkit scam

Miscellaneous suggestions

The portrayal of Brooklyn in movies

A sports team—e.g., Brooklynites' relationship with the Dodgers, the history of Ebbets Field

Oral history

Explore some aspect of the immigrant experience: Why did these individuals immigrate? What did they expect to find, and what did they find? What are their relationships like with their parents or with their children?

What did a neighborhood or a block or a building used to be like? What do the inhabitants think caused the changes? How do they feel about the changes?

What is happening with your high school graduating class? Has their attitude toward their high school experience changed since graduation? How have the dreams, goals, expectations they had when graduated been met? How do they see the future?

Is there a difference in the attitudes of younger and older African Americans or immigrants or your family members or any other group you can think of?

Note: Some of these topics are very broad and need to be narrowed, considerably narrowed. They are intended to stimulate your thinking. And as always in this class, you may choose a topic not on this list, even one not remotely similar to any of them. What matters is that the topic interests you and is an appropriate research topic. You will submit your topic for approval.