

Adapted from materials developed by Alan Perry and the AHS English Department.

What is a topic?

A student will investigate an area of interest, poverty and medical care as an example, and narrow the area of interest until the arguments and data are sufficient and can be managed in a thirteen to fifteen page paper. The student identifies whether sufficient information is available through preliminary research. The student might choose to study access to emergency care among the poor, or government provisions for preventive medicine among the homeless or among the working poor. Most students write (or think about) a preliminary version of an outline to see if the topic is appropriately narrow and sufficiently broad.

What is a hypothesis?

Once the topic has been selected, the student states an opinion based on a cursory understanding of the available information. The student might write, "Our government provides substandard emergency care for poor people," or "Poor preventive care for the poor leads to expensive and unnecessary hospitalizations." The hypothesis should be arguable: some experts must believe that the government provides appropriate emergency care to the poor or that the poor have sufficient access to good preventive care. Once the student develops an hypothesis, she must research both (all) sides of the argument, both data and logic, until she verifies that the hypothesis is true. During this process, the student usually revises the hypothesis. For instance, the student may discover that standards for emergency care vary from state to state. She may decide to focus on emergency care in California. Alternately, the student may discover that the opposite of the hypothesis is true! In either case, the student changes and fine-tunes the hypothesis until it can be successfully argued.

What is a thesis?

A good thesis is researchable, arguable, properly limited, clearly stated, concise, and innovative. The student will write a good thesis by further researching and by fine-tuning the hypothesis:

- by writing as short a statement as possible (a good goal is 8-10 words);
- by selecting strong, interesting and active verbs not in the passive voice;
- by making sure that the selected nouns specifically identify the subject under consideration.

Assignment

Respond to the following on a separate piece of paper; include the question before each response:

1. State your final ISP topic.
2. State your ISP hypothesis. Is your hypothesis as CONCISE as possible?
3. How might your area of research be further narrowed or focused.
4. Tell how your hypothesis is truly ARGUABLE. What might an interesting opposing argument be?
5. How do you plan to ensure your project is INNOVATIVE (not just a rehash of some hackneyed subject)?
6. Do you know for certain your topic is RESEARCHABLE? Tell specifically where and how you plan to gather information; make a specific list, not just "the internet, the library, magazines, books, etc."
7. Is your topic indeed PERSONALLY SIGNIFICANT? What motivated you to pursue this particular area of research?

Dear parent/guardian:

Your English III student is beginning a major research project. Please take a few minutes to review the overall process with him/her, including topic choice (above), deadline sheet (in the student's possession), and the parent ISP guidelines (on the other side of this page). Previously you signed the Plagiarism Agreement. Please sign this form signifying that you know of and approve of the topic choice. Please take an active and ongoing interest in your student's research project (if possible), thereby minimizing any surprises later on.

Student name (printed neatly)

Period _____

I have reviewed the project handouts with my son/daughter, approve of the topic choice, and understand his/her obligations.

Signed (parent/guardian) _____ Date:
