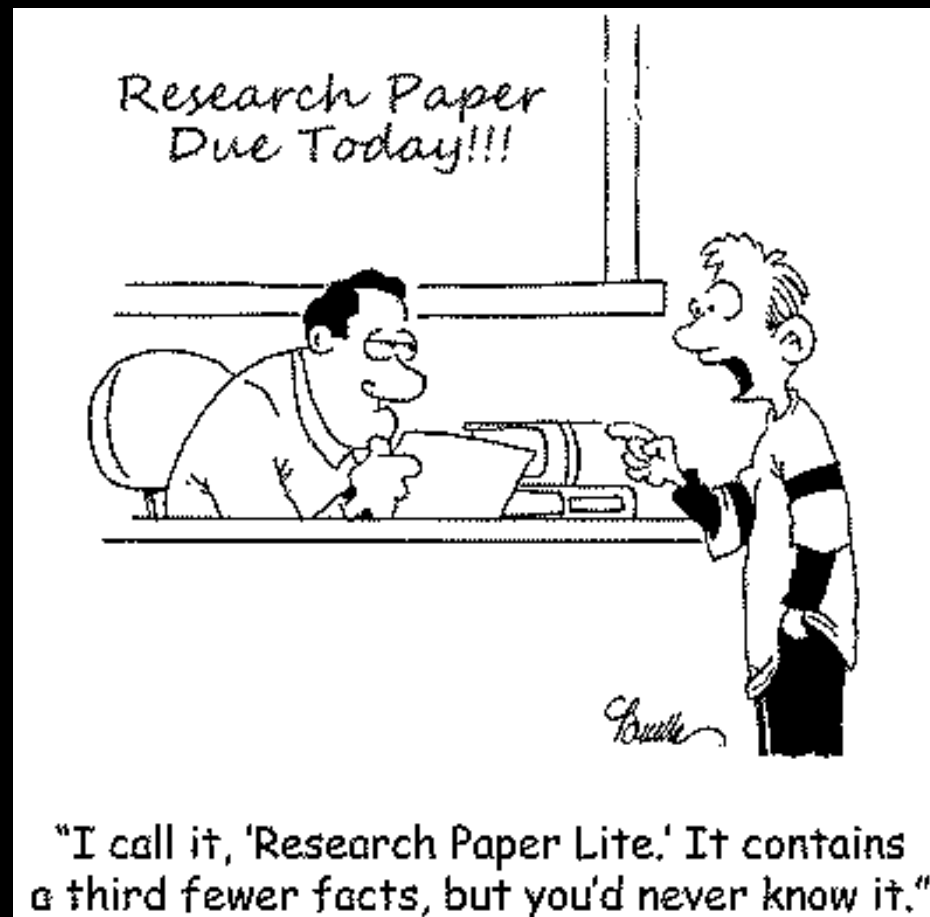


Finding and Refining Your Topic



Step 1- Identifying Possibilities

- Step 1 a: List of possible topics
 - Write out potential list of general topics
 - Don't know?
 - What are your general interests? Can this be translated into a topic? (Outside-in)
 - **WARNING: The sources may not be there to pursue this topic!**
 - What can be done? What in the sources look interesting? (Inside-out)

Step 1- Identifying Possibilities

- **Step 1b: Refining General Topics**

- What themes could be explored in my topic?
 - e.g. – environmental, social, women's history, psycho-history, political, ethnic, etc...
 - Does it fit the annual NHD Theme?
- What are the the questions raised by this topic?
 - Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- What are different perspective that I may find?
How would I need to find balance? (revisit this question often as you do your research)

Step 1- Identifying Possibilities

- **Step 1c: Formulated Preliminary Research Questions**
 - Based on my previous answers, what questions am I likely to be trying to answer?
 - Can they actually even be answered?
- **Step 1d: Self-reflection**
 - What are my biases in regards to these questions?
 - Are my biases weaknesses or strengths? Both?
How will I deal with them in the process of my research and final product?

Step 2 – Primary Sources

- **Step 2a: Identifying Primary Sources**
 - What sources would I need to consult to answer my research questions?
 - Do I have access to those sources given the time constraints? Are there other sources I can consult?
 - What kinds of information do I expect to find in those sources?
 - What will I do if they don't have what I expect?
 - What are the flaws (reflections of bias) of these sources? How will I deal with these flaws?

Step 2 – Primary Sources

- **Step 2b: Reviewing the Sources**

- Here you need to look at your primary sources

- Do they have the data you expect? Do they have things you didn't expect?
- What don't the sources tell me?
- Is there enough here to answer my research questions?
 - Yes – Yipee!
 - No – Do I need to reformulate my questions? Do I need to pursue another topic? Either way, **return to Step 1.**

Step 3 – Literature Review

- **Step 3a: Identifying Secondary Sources**

- What secondary sources will I need to consult?

- What studies are likely to have been done in relation to my topic?
- Where can I find these sources?
- Think about the topic broadly – what other studies may have my topic as a minor part of their research?
 - Brainstorm topics to research and find secondary sources

Step 3 – Literature Review

- **Step 3b: Summarizing Secondary Literature**
 - You must review ALL the secondary sources you can
 - What have other historians concluded about my topic? What have they ignored?
 - Will my approach prove anything?
 - “So what?” – in other words, why is my project important?
 - In light of what you have learned, return to Step 1 and refine your research question and review the primary sources again
 - **Take Notes !!!!**

Step 4 – Taking the Big Leap

- Step 4a: Gut check

- Can I do this in a semester?
- Will it meet the requirements?
- Can I envision what this project will be like? (It will change – this isn't written in stone)
- Can I formulate a preliminary thesis? **No? Go back to Steps 2 and 3**

- Step 4b: Finalize

- Start collecting and organizing data

It may seem daunting, but remember
the best thing you can do is



**KEEP
CALM
AND
CARRY
ON**