

Step 2

Moving from a Research Question to Writing an Introduction

This is a mini lesson focused on developing a research question. In this mini-lesson, students write a first draft of the *Introduction* for their report/presentation that situates and explains their research question. It is a first draft, because:

- 1) the question may be refined when students get more information
- 2) writing and revising multiple drafts is how to move from rough ideas to a version of a report or presentation that could be circulated to community members and government officials who students might want to work with in the future.

Introduction

The first section of the report or presentation that students will write is called, the *Introduction*.

The *Introduction* is designed to do two things:

- 1) Provide the information that a reader will need to understand the research question.
- 2) Convince readers that they too should care about the research question students have chosen.

Below are two *Introductions* that *TfC* classes have written. One class wanted to know, “[i]f the lack of activities and leisure options for young people in Halifax and Northampton Counties in North Carolina was related to poverty and violent crime?” Another class wanted to know, “[w]hat determines whether a teenager in Rye Town, New York will look for and obtain a job?” (See below.)

Exercise for the first mini lesson:

Here is what students should do:

- 1) With their research teams, read through the two sample introductions (below) twice. Then choose the introduction that they think is the most effective or that is most interesting to them (then go to #2).
 - 2) Circle the sentences that provide information that the reader will need to know to understand the question.
 - 3) Underline the sentences that try to convince the reader that he or she should care about the research question
(Note, some sentences might be both circled and underlined.)
- 4) Write a paragraph that gets people interested or excited about their question. The best way to get started is to have students remember why **they** choose this question, what made them care and then try to communicate that to people who might read this paragraph.
 - 5) Write a second paragraph that gives some background information on their question. They should ask themselves: What does the reader need to know to understand our question?

Sample Introductions:

Introduction A:

Many of the issues relating to crime and violence in the communities, and schools in Halifax and Northampton counties in North Carolina are related to the actions of teens. Would teens be involved in these things if they had more leisure and recreation options? What is the cost of not providing adequate activities for young people? In Halifax and Northampton counties, activities and leisure opportunities are limited primarily to the school and church. A community deserves great activities that go beyond a single movie theater, a handful of outdoor recreational centers,

and fast food restaurants. These are fine but what are young people supposed to do if they can't get to these places because of a lack of public transportation? What should they do if they need other kinds of activities?

What do teens like us do given these limited activities? Some travel to Raleigh or to Rocky Mount, but for those who do not have access to transportation what are they to do? This results in boredom and in extreme cases, crime and violence. In this Report, we try to figure out why so many young people are bored and what happens when they are bored. The research question that we have developed is: "Are the lack of activities and leisure options for young people in Halifax and Northampton counties related to poverty¹ and violent crime?"²

Introduction B:

We are told over and over that it is important for all teenagers to get experience in the work force no matter their gender, race or socio-economic status. We know that many teenagers need jobs to support their families and that others want jobs for the purpose of having spending money or gaining new experience. We take for granted that jobs teach teenagers discipline and self-determination. Research also suggests there are a number of benefits to teenage employment: 1) jobs will help teens develop their organizational skills, as well as management skills; 2) "Starter jobs" can also pave the way for a teenager's future career, and boost their resume; 3) Teenagers in the workforce also learn how to deal with a wide variety of people, and can gain new perspectives and of course, 4) employment also serves as an alternative to gangs, drugs, and teenage pregnancy, and so on.

¹ By poverty we mean: "the state in which someone can afford the cost of living, however, their annual income is not enough to enhance their life and escape poverty."

² By violence we mean: "a form of physical, verbal, or cyber abuse that essentially inflict pain on others."

There is one problem here. We are so focused on the benefits of work that we haven't bothered to examine how teenage employment happens or doesn't happen? It is not that information about the value of work is wrong or unhelpful. It is just incomplete. Despite the value of work, many teens in our community don't look for work in high school. What is missing, then, is hard data about why teens apply for job or don't apply for jobs in the first place. How they find work? What kind of work they find? Why they believe they are hired or not hired. And now how New York's new minimum wage law might impact whether they will look for a job. Just as important as the answers to these questions are, it may be even more important to compare answers teens give with the views of employers. These were the issues that lay behind our work this year. Our point of departure was the question: "What determines whether a teenager in Rye Town will look for and obtain a job?"

