

## STEP 3

### Building your own Literature Review

**This is an example of how students can build a literature review, with a little curation by the teacher.** Students in a *TfC* class in New York were excited about the Scottish Independence Referendum (2014) which included sixteen- and seventeen-year olds. Inspired by this they then developed the following research question: *How might lowering the minimum voting age to sixteen in local elections impact the quality of citizenship in our communities?*

#### I. What do we need to know about our topic now?

We then gave students some resources related to youth and voting and asked students to develop a list of smaller or middle level questions about the topic. These would be questions they should answer before they collected their own data. Here is the list of things they thought they should know about the topic at this point in the research process:

- What can we learn from previous efforts in America to extend the right to vote at the national and local levels? How exactly are those efforts different from ours?
- Besides Takoma, Maryland, are there other communities that have extended the right to vote to teenagers?
- How does political awareness differ between age groups?
  - What are the popular media or print sources of information for the various age groups? How reliable and factual are those sources?
- How might we analyze the differences between sixteen-year old's' involvement (when given the right to vote) in typical voting and “emotional voting” – such as the vote on Scotland's Independence Referendum, which was about national identity.

- Perhaps, our students wondered, there might be a distinction to be made between the two types of voting issues and which one sixteen-year olds would be better suited to vote for.
- Have any communities attempted some sort of interim change as part of the process in lowering the voting age in local elections? Has anyone tried to institute a step between not having the right to vote and having the right to vote — i.e. a “mock vote?” If so, how have turnouts for these practice elections reflected the actual voter turnouts that followed? What were sixteen-year old’s’ attitudes on this interim step? How long did the step take?
- In general, what are sixteen-year old’s’ attitudes on having the right to vote? Do they feel strongly or are many of them indifferent? Do they want to vote? Do they feel capable of voting?
  - How do these attitudes compare to the attitudes of adults (which could potentially be demonstrated by their voting participation)? Do adults feel more capable of making voting decisions than teen-agers?
  - Beyond voting, what research is there to show young that adults can and do make their own informed decisions? What research demonstrates they are not capable of understanding complex issues and/or voting?
- What are the best ways to analyze America’s history of voting age requirements and the importance of why each requirement is in place?
- How have lowered voting ages impacted voting as a whole? For example, would more adults get involved in local voting if they knew their children were voting?

- Might young adults become more civically engaged in other aspects of civic life after exercising or receiving the right to vote?
- Besides voting, in what other instances are teenagers are treated as adults and what can we learn from these examples?
- What potential political shifts might take place if teens vote and should we investigate these potential political shifts?
  - Did the sixteen-year old's' votes alter the expected results of the Scottish elections? If so, how?
- Should we put time into exploring a correlation between parents' voting preferences and how their children might vote? Would allowing teen to vote be tantamount to giving their parents an extra vote because kids tend to follow their parents voting choices?
- What are the parallels and contrasts between our town and outside communities which have taken this step? Then, with these comparisons in mind, how might we analyze the impact that lowering the voting age has had on these outside communities? Would doing so generate predictions for what would happen in our own community.
- We should look into the counterarguments brought up on past efforts and how they were either conceded or refuted.
- We should research what each community that has taken this step has in common. What are the central factors that have encouraged lowering the voting ages around the world?

## **II. Moving from Questions to Sections of the Literature Review.**

With an eye to the literature review sections our students would write for their report or presentation, we choose the three or four most important questions our students had developed and tentatively assumed these would be the sections for our literature review.

## **Researching Your Literature Review Sections.**

We then helped students find answers to the questions they had generated by brainstorming relevant sources. Here are the kinds of sources we relied on: journal articles, newspapers, census data etc. For example, you may ask your students where they think they may find information about where in the United States local communities have lowered the voting age in local elections to the age of sixteen.

We have found that students are not necessarily well versed on web search techniques on browsers, let alone on databases. It is, then, a good idea to model a browser or database search to determine the level of sophistication your students possess. Once they get the idea, they will start to find search terms and phrases that result in their finding useful sources.

Bill sometimes expedites the process of identifying and then finding appropriate resources by involving students in a demonstration online and then in a database, such as JSTOR. Valerie, on the other hand, uses the New York Times website to show students how to track down resources from that newspaper's broad database of past and current articles. In those articles, primary sources are often mentioned along with researcher's names, institutions where they work and professional publications in which their studies have appeared. She then backs into a Google Scholar or JSTOR search armed with key words and journal titles.

Here are the tentative sections we came up for a literature review (by combining and merging the questions our students developed) along with the sources we used:

- 1) Who or what body in our town decides who can vote in local or school board elections?
  - How do they make decisions?
  - Can we learn anything about how we should move forward by looking at other/recent decisions this group has made?

- Who is allowed to vote in local elections now—has that ever changed?
- Do we want to try to vote in school board or, Rye town elections?

**Sources:** Our students interviewed a number of elected officials, including a local State Senator.

- 2) What political strategies and data worked in Takoma, Maryland or any other places where they successfully lowered the voting age in local elections?

**Source:** Our students interviewed Tim Male, Council Member in the City of Takoma Park, Maryland who was the force behind the decision to lower the voting age in his town.

- 3) What are the best arguments for and against lowering the voting age both here in America and abroad?

**Sources:** JSTOR and Google Scholar search.

- 4) What strategies and arguments worked and did not work in getting women and Blacks voting rights?

**Sources:** JSTOR, Google Scholar

We then divided this class into four groups that corresponded to these four sections and worked with them to try to explore the sources to answer their questions and write up their findings in paragraph form. Then a small group of students and Bill edited these paragraphs and ordered them, so they became first drafts of the sections of our Literature Review.