

Step 4

Identifying your research population

This is a blueprint of prompts and activities to help students make decisions about which people or organizations they want to focus on in their field research. The following steps work well with classes divided into research teams and, of course, these steps might also be used by students working on research projects on their own. The organizational process we present is suitable for many types of classroom environments, including the recent proliferation of de-centralized, or collaborative classrooms, in which furniture is mobile and multiple monitors with Internet access are available around the room. In flexible classrooms, it is especially important to give students group management strategies along with instruction in how to proceed with work.

1. To begin, research team members should make a list of their members. Each of them will have a role to play and it is important to distribute responsibilities and expect accountability. We have encountered situations in which students are also in a school musical or have athletic commitments. So, in dividing work, it is important for everyone to own their availability and not promise what cannot be delivered due to genuine schedule conflicts.
2. Research suggests that the first person to speak often influences those who speak later, making them more likely to agree with his/her views and less likely to present their own views. Remind your students that it is a goal of this phase of research to get the benefit of the diverse perspectives that are in each group.
3. For each of the following questions, each group member should write an answer to the questions on their own sheet of paper or screen *and* then have a group discussion. (This

way you minimize the chance that the first speakers will unduly influence the process and thus have a better chance of fully leverage the diversity perspectives in your class.) Each research team should reach a consensus on the best responses and present them to the classmates.

4. As the facilitator and principal researcher, you (the teacher) remind students that a research question provides hints about which people they might want to talk to, how they might want to talk to them, and what they might want to ask them. For example, if your students were interested in how religious belief or faith among cancer-survivor's changes over the course of their treatment, we would want to focus on cancer survivors and ask in-depth questions that allowed them to tell their own stories about how religion helped them.
5. Here are some possible tasks for your research groups: Have teams make a list of the kinds of people who could best answer the class' research question and where they might find these people. Are they members of the general population or are they a particular generation, particular race, gender, or class, particular school grade, residents of a specific community, individuals who have had a particular experience?

Have each research team develop and be prepared to share with the whole class the following:

- i. a two-sentence argument that will convince the rest of the class why the group they identified would be the best group to answer the research question. (Sample sentence: "We are interested in whether people feel safe in our county, to do this we need to talk to a people from all parts of the

county and from every demographic, roughly in proportion to the presence of that demographic in the county.”)

- ii. a two-sentence argument that will convince the rest of the class that the method they chose—focus group, survey, interviews, or participant observation— is the best method to answer the research question.
6. Remind your student researchers that sometimes it is hard to ask people to answer their research question directly because of both how large the question is and the fact that the best answers often come from indirect questions. Researchers, often come up with smaller, easier to answer questions that taken together, can help answer the research question. Then, have your students individually write and then share with their team or the class, two questions/prompts they think *must be asked* in their field research.

