



Worksheets

for Senior Thesis Writers

(and other writers, too)

*This packet of exercises was prepared by Sheila M. Reindl, Ed.D.
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These worksheets provide prompts for freewriting, i.e., questions and sentence stems that give you a running start when you sit down to do some focused freewriting. Focused or prompted freewriting is uncensored writing that is done in the service of creativity, of generating ideas and potential links between ideas. For more information on freewriting, see "Twenty Tips for Senior Thesis Writers (and other writers, too)" and "Writing Things Down Before Writing Things Up (for senior thesis writers and other writers, too)," both by Sheila M. Reindl; both handouts are available at the Bureau of Study Counsel of Harvard University and at bsc.harvard.edu.

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Connecting with Your Curiosity

What really interests me is . . .

(OR, alternatively, When I started this project, the thing that really interested me was . . .)

(OR, alternatively, What really drew me to this topic in the first place was . . .)

Putting Vague Thoughts into the Form of Questions

Here is a list of questions – large and small, near and far, grand and modest, and in no particular order – that I might want to consider in my thesis:

Identifying Your Guiding/Governing Question

If I had to put my topic into the form of a single question, that question would be . . .
(OR, alternatively, What I really want to know is . . .)

Questions and Prompts toward an Introduction

or

So What and Why Bother?: Identifying What Makes Your Question a Question at All and What Makes It a Question Worth Addressing

My guiding question derives from competing observations*, i.e., observations that appear to me to be in tension with one another and to indicate an apparent puzzle, problem, discrepancy, oversight, mystery, contradiction, or surprise. The competing observations that give rise to my guiding question are . . .

. . . on the one hand . . .

. . . but on the other hand/and yet . . .

The tension between these competing observations points to an apparent contradiction, mystery, conflict, surprise, discrepancy, problem, oversight, or puzzle, namely . . .

The question that follows from that apparent contradiction, mystery, conflict, surprise, discrepancy, problem, oversight, or puzzle is . . .

The question I pose is of interest to other scholars/researchers because . . .

*Any given paper might be a response to more than two competing observations.

Questions and Prompts toward a Literature Review

Who else (or what other body or bodies of literature) has attempted to address my guiding question (or related questions)?

The question they asked was . . .

The way they approached their question was to . . .

What they ended up saying in response to the question they posed is . . .

What remains unasked/unresolved/overlooked/unexplored/unaddressed/misunderstood is . . .

My project addresses that gap by . . .

Questions and Prompts toward a Methods Section

I can think of my methods as being, in part, the actual tasks (e.g., library research, interviews, viewing of videos or film, field observations) I will need to undertake to approach the question I am posing. Those tasks are (and I will try to be as specific as I can) . . .

Other methods I could potentially use (i.e., other tasks I could potentially undertake) to approach the question I'm posing are . . .

My reasons for choosing to use some of the methods I list above and not others are . . .

Terms I will need to define to do this research include . . .

Some of the methodological issues/problems/challenges with which I will need to contend are (these include both questions others might ask about how I am approaching my question as well as questions I myself have about how I am approaching my question) . . .

I might respond to or deal with those methodological issues/problems/challenges by . . .

Questions and Prompts toward a Chapter

If I had to put this chapter into the form of a single question, that question would be . . .

Here is a list of other questions I need to address in this chapter:

Questions and Prompts toward a Conclusion

The headway I've made toward resolution of my guiding question is . . .

What remains unresolved is . . .

It remains unresolved because . . .

My research has implications for . . .

For instance, my research has methodological implications for future research, that is, implications for *how we frame the questions* in this field and implications for the *methods we use to address those questions*. Those implications include . . .

Other implications include (e.g., implications for specific practices or policies, implications for how we interpret results of previous research) . . .

Reckoning with Complexity

What makes my question a particularly complex* one with which to reckon is that . . .

I will attempt to reckon with those complexities by . . .

*Remember: You do not necessarily need to clear up all of the complexity, but you at least need to be clear about how and why things are (and remain) complex.

Narrowing the Scope

It is beyond the scope of my paper to . . .

Therefore, I won't consider/explore/analyze that issue in depth in this piece. For the purposes of this paper, I will . . . (e.g., assume . . . /work on the premise that . . . /summarize others' thinking on this matter . . . /refer the reader to . . .)

I make that *particular* assumption/work on that *particular* premise/summarize that *particular* person's thinking/refer the reader to that *particular* literature because . . .

Gems without a Setting*

Here are some of the ideas that I might not be able to include in this thesis or paper but that deserve safekeeping because they are brilliant and precious thoughts – or at least interesting thoughts – that might come in handy for some other project:

* I borrow this term from writing instructor Larry Weinstein. He encouraged me to write down the ideas and questions that I found interesting but that did not seem to have a place in my current paper.