The Eight Steps of Research

Adapted from: *"A Guide to Historical Research Through the National History Day Program"*

- Research is a natural part of everyday life, but there are effective ways to conduct research.
- Although the steps below are presented sequentially, the actual process is not so tidy. Students may be working on several steps at once or may go back and forth among the steps.
- A useful model for thinking about research is this: LEARN, THINK, SHARE. That is, students learn about a topic; think about a topic; and share what they have learned.

Step I: Getting organized for research

Teacher
1. builds a sense of excitement and a positive attitude in students about the research project.
2. identifies potential resources—e.g., libraries, archives, historic sites, the Internet, people.
3. helps students to develop note-taking and paper-management systems.
4. informs students about project management procedures, such as contracts, work sheets, timelines, and weekly plans.

Students
1. identify a preferred category (exhibit, paper, performance, documentary, web site) and decide whether they would like to do an individual or group project.

Step II: Selecting a topic

Teacher
1. discusses the NHD theme and the importance of relating a topic to the theme.
2. presents a timeline for selecting a topic and guidelines for changing a topic.

Teacher and students
1. brainstorm possible topics using NHD and FHF suggested lists and considering possible links to the planned curriculum.
2. discuss how to formulate research questions that explore who, what, when, where, why, and how issues.

Students
1. think about topics based on their personal interests and curiosities.

Step III: Background reading for historical content

Teacher
1. introduces primary and secondary sources through discussion and exercises.

Students
1. begin background reading using secondary sources (e.g., encyclopedias, books, magazines, newspapers, people) and practice using source sheets to record where they find information.
2. begin developing specific research questions.
3. develop a working title.

Step IV: Narrowing the topic

Students
1. identify a specific, manageable research topic using a process that goes from the general to the specific: INTEREST (native peoples)→THEME (innovation in history)→TOPIC (native languages) →ISSUE (Navajo Code Talkers).

Step V: Gathering and recording information

Teacher
1. explains the difference between quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing text.
2. explains how to identify credible Internet sources and encourages students to exercise skepticism.

Students
1. refine note-taking.
2. practice the skills of skimming text for content, using indexes, and creating lists of unknown vocabulary.
3. use a variety of primary and secondary sources to gather information.

Step VI: Analyzing and interpreting sources

Teacher
1. guides students in constructing meaning from sources.

Students
1. make connections and identify patterns among sources.
2. practice questioning, weighing evidence, and identifying opinions and bias.
3. think chronologically and use timelines to establish context and significance of the topic.
4. identify gaps and inconsistencies in gathered evidence.
5. identify various perspectives relating to the topic.
6. establish cause and effect, impact and significance.

Step VII. Developing a thesis statement

Teacher
1. reviews the definition and purpose of a thesis statement.

Students
1. prepare a narrow (i.e., one or two sentences) and pointed thesis statement.
2. ensure that their thesis sentence explains the historical significance of their topic and its connection to the NHD theme.

Step VIII. Developing a History Day project

Teacher
1. reviews rules for category types.
2. explains requirements and styles for the process paper, citations, and the bibliography.
3. prepares students for levels of competition and the judging process.

Students
1. review judging evaluation forms and judging criteria.
2. use checklists to ensure that projects satisfy criteria for historical content, design, and presentation.
3. construct entries and make revisions based on feedback from reviewers (family, teacher, friends).
4. practice interviews.