

Background Draft #1

An Assignment intended to develop research and critical thinking skills

Although it will be essential for you to understand how and why your project is important for your sponsor and conditioned by its particular circumstances, it is almost certain other people will have confronted and studied similar problems in other organizations, places, and/or contexts. Very often, they will have learned much in the process that could inform your project. You must find, organize and synthesize pertinent information. The information you seek will reside in books, scholarly articles, web sites, databases, heads, and so forth, but rarely in the precise form you need it, and almost always surrounded by lots of information you don't need.

Your job in this assignment is to begin reading and writing about important issues concerning your project. Your reading will help you begin to understand what is known about your topic, and to think critically about the key arguments and differing perspectives of experts and others connected to your topic. Your writing will not only provide a means for you to communicate to others what you are learning, but the act of writing itself will help clarify your thinking.

Task

The team should begin researching the project's key domains of knowledge and write an essay. The main elements of this assignment are to:

1. Find relevant information
2. Read and take notes summarizing key information, including in annotated bibliography form
3. Write a letter to your liaison describing key ideas and alternative viewpoints relevant to understanding your project problem, and its potential causes, effects and solutions.

1. Finding relevant information: the library tutorial (and follow-up work with the librarian) and faculty advice will provide you guidance about what is relevant literature and how to begin finding it. Look for material especially from **academic and professional journals, your main sources** of information. Once you find a good article or book, check the sources cited by the author and search for that material – this is often an efficient way to find related work. Be sure to emphasize **recent work**, and to review **all relevant previous IQPs ASAP**.

2. Note-taking & annotated bibliography: Individual note-taking strategies vary widely – use what works for you, but if you are uncertain or struggling, your Writing Center tutor and/or instructor can offer you suggestions (see also your writing guide book). For every work you consult, make an entry into your annotated bibliography briefly noting:

1. Citation information: Author, title, date, journal or publisher, etc. Use APA style.
2. Main subject: What main subject or research question did the authors address?
3. Project relevance: How, if at all, might this piece help you understand or conduct your project? Why?

3. Letter: Write a 6-8 page letter to your liaison introducing the concepts you have researched and the information you have found that you believe the sponsor will find useful in understanding how you are thinking about their problem and your project. Include in the letter the following elements:

- A concise statement of the concepts you researched
- Why, you think the concepts are important for the project (or, if you have decided now they are not important, why you thought it might be important and why you have changed your mind)
- A list of specific topics your letter will address (responding to the following generic categories):
 - Different explanations (or considerations for understanding) the causes of the problem
 - Different ideas about possible solutions
 - Examples, both successful and unsuccessful, of how others have tried to solve similar problems elsewhere
 - Potential resources for the project (people, reports, institutions, methods, etc.)
 - A conclusion stating what further steps, if any, you expect the team to take to further research this concept, and any new concepts identified through this research that you expect to pursue.

You must cite at least 20 sources in this paper. Cite all sources of information in the text of your letter and include a list of works cited using APA style.