



Workshop: Developing possible presentation topics and research questions

MAY 11, 2017

Today's agenda

1. Warm-up exercise: Respond to the Artificial Intelligence presentation
2. In-class writing and group work: Brainstorming a list of possible essay topics and generating more details by using freewriting
3. Drafting research questions

Warm-up activity

- ▶ We will watch another sample presentation: “The Wonderful and Terrifying Implications of Computers that Can Learn” by Jeremy Howard. As you watch, take notes on the worksheet:

- 1) How is machine learning different from traditional computer programming?
- 2) What are some things that computer learning has made possible? Please give specific examples.
- 3) What are some things that deep learning has enabled computers to learn more effectively than people?
- 4) What is the major problem that could result from the machine learning revolution?

- 1) What did the presenter do well?
- 2) What can the presenter improve?
- 3) What questions do you have for the presenter?

Starting the presentation design process

- ▶ In today's class, you will begin the process of creating your own academic presentation

Brainstorming possible topics

- ▶ You will begin the process of selecting a topic by **generating ideas**:
- ▶ Within your academic field, which topics / issues are you most **interested in** and **passionate about**?
- ▶ Make a **list** in your notebook.



Adding details: Freewriting

- ▶ Next, You will use a technique called **freewriting** to think of **more details** about your possible topics.
- ▶ When you write in English, you might experience **writer's block** (not knowing what to write) or worry about **spelling, grammar, punctuation**, and so on.

Adding details: Freewriting

- ▶ When freewriting, you **do not need to worry** about content or correctness
- ▶ In order to freewrite, simply write without stopping for several minutes.
- ▶ You should try to write in English, but you can switch to your first language if you cannot find the right word or phrase. You do not have to write in complete sentences.

Adding details: Freewriting

- ▶ Choose one possible topic and freewrite about it for 5-8 minutes.
- ▶ Try to answer these questions in your freewrite:
 1. **Why** are you passionate about this topic?
 2. What do you **already know** about this topic?
 3. What do you **want to learn** about this topic?
- ▶ If you cannot answer these questions, write about anything you can think of, **but do not stop writing!**

Next, choose another possible topic and repeat the process

Pair / group work

- ▶ Make pairs or small groups with students from the same field (**Engineering, Informatics, International Development**)
- ▶ Give each other feedback:
 1. Which of your group members' possible topics are the **most interesting** to you, and why?
 2. Can you clearly understand **why these topics are important** to your group members and **what they want to learn about them**? If not, what information should be added?
 3. What are some **additional aspects of these topics** your group members could write about?

Drafting Research Questions

- ▶ Now that you have thought about possible topics, it is important to determine **focused**, **specific** and **feasible goals** for your presentation.
- ▶ In this class, you will establish your presentation objectives in the form of **research questions**
- ▶ Two main considerations when drafting research questions are:
 1. Determining an **appropriate scope**
 2. **Avoiding bias**

Sample research questions

- 1) How is the concept of “criticality” defined in a Master of Arts TESOL course?
- 2) How do graduate students’ understand the concepts and methods of criticality?
- 3) How do these understandings change during a semester-long course and after the course has concluded?

(Nuske, 2014)

Proper Scope

- ▶ Think carefully about **how much information** you will try to address and **what can be convincingly argued** within the time available (in our class, about 20 minutes)
- ▶ Avoid topics and goals that are **too simple** or **too complex**
- ▶ Academic presentations are often **unsuccessful** when the presenter tries to cover **too much information** or makes **claims that are not properly supported** by data/evidence.

Proper Scope

- ▶ “Does correcting English as a Foreign Language learners’ written grammar errors help them to become better writers?” ✘
- ▶ This presentation examines 50 English-language essays produced by 25 Japanese EFL learners in order to answer the following question:
“How effective are written grammar corrections in helping learners to avoid repeating mistakes in later essays?”

Avoiding bias

- ▶ Be careful to avoid research questions that **jump to a predetermined conclusion**
- ▶ “Why does social network have a negative effect on students’ academic performance?” ❌
- ▶ Make sure that your research questions allow for a **fair, open-minded investigation**, in which conclusions are drawn on the basis of **data** and **evidence** rather than pre-existing belief or opinion
- ▶ “How does social network use affect students’ academic performance?”

In-class writing / Homework

- ▶ Make a tentative selection of your presentation topic for this class.
- ▶ Write a **full, polished paragraph** that explains the following:
 1. Your intended topic and its significance
 2. Your goals for the presentation
- ▶ I will collect your paragraphs next week!