

Discernment Workshop

FINDING YOUR BIG QUESTION · STEP 1

A. Personal significance

1. If you could dedicate your life to solving a problem or answering a question with unlimited resources and no financial worry, what would it be? What draws you the most? Feel free to make a list if there are several pulling at you. Explain the why behind the draw/pull for each.
2. What makes these problems complicated? Why are they difficult to solve or answer?
3. Are there any big questions you find yourself thinking about and returning to?
 - a. Are there any difficulties, limitations, opportunities, experiences that you keep running into and wonder about, want to process, etc.?
 - b. What are themes or threads in books you like, content you are drawn to on social media, shows you find intriguing? Why might you be drawn to those themes?

B. Readings + course themes

1. What readings or course themes have you found most fascinating so far?
2. Did any significant question(s) arise for you during the semester from class discussions?

C. Locating the intersections

1. How do your interests and fascinations intersect with the course readings and themes? Pick one or two interesting intersections and write about them here (1–2 paragraphs each).

Discernment Workshop

STEPS 2-3

Step 2

In pairs or small groups (if assigned), discuss any themes or promising intersections that emerged in your free writing.

Step 3

Develop three possible, pointed research questions that pull on the intersections emerging from the previous steps.

Circle the most promising.

What primary sources would be helpful here? Do you have ideas for secondary sources? Or, do you have ideas about where to look for secondary sources?

Developed by Dr. Lily Abadal with support from the DELTA Project. Learn more at drlilyabadal.com.

Thesis Statement Workshop

CLEAR. ARGUABLE. DEFENSIBLE.

Step 1

Write one, single thesis statement in your notebook. Not a paragraph or string of ideas. Just one statement that clearly identifies the position you plan to argue.

Step 2

Exchange thesis statements with one person in your group. Give feedback answering these three questions (write your answers in their notebook):

1. Is the thesis clear? Explain it in your own words. Check in with your partner if this is what they intended.
2. Is it specific? Is this too vague to write a paper on? Does it zone in on a particular question and line of inquiry?
3. Is it defensible? Can this be supported through argument and evidence?

Step 3

Take back your notebook. Rewrite your thesis using the advice and feedback from your partner. If time permits, get a final pass from your instructor for the green light to proceed.

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Research + Annotation

UNDERSTANDING THE DISCOURSE

You'll need two separate pages in your notebook for this (back + front = 1 page). Each page should be dedicated to one article. Follow these steps one article at a time.

Step 1

Write a simple citation at the top of the page. This should include: Author/s. Title. Journal name OR publisher. Year. Pages.

Step 2 – Summary

Write the first paragraph of your annotation. This should be a brief summary of the article or book chapter. What is the main argument if it is a theoretical article? What are the results if it is empirical research and how was the study conducted? Are there limits to those results?

Step 3 – Relevance

Write the second paragraph of your annotation. This should identify the connection between the article you've picked and the research question you've selected.

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Argument Mapping

BUILDING THE LOGICAL FLOW · STEP 1

Recreate the table below in your notebook. There is no definitive number of premises your argument should have. If you need less than three, fine. More than three, also fine (but beware that your argument is getting complicated).

Write your thesis statement (this is the conclusion of a syllogistic argument)
Premise #1: Evidence:
Premise #2: Evidence:
Premise #3: Evidence:

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Argument Mapping

STEP 2-3

Step 2

In your notebook, reflect on the following:

1. Are you satisfied with the logical flow of your argument right now? If not, are you stuck somewhere? What are you unsure of?
2. Where are you lacking evidence? Are you unsure of what sort of evidence is appropriate for various premises? Which ones?

Step 3

If you think you are finished, run your map by your instructor for the green light to proceed. If they flag some potential concerns, write those down in your notebook.

Objections + Replies

THOUGHTFULLY RESPONDING TO CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Step 1

Exchange argument maps with partners or in small groups (three or four-way exchange). Write two potential objections to the argument you are analyzing (~3 sentences in length). These should be in regard to the logical flow and necessity of the argument OR the sort of evidence presented to support it. Clearly label them in your notebook.

EX. Objection #1: _____

Objection #2: _____

Step 2

Discuss the objections you wrote and received with the person you exchanged notebooks with. Make sure you are clear on the critique so you can respond accordingly.

Step 3

Now that you fully grasp the objections raised by your partner, write two thoughtful responses to those objections. Is there evidence to support your response? Do you need to find evidence to support your response? This should be roughly one paragraph in length. Clearly label them:

EX. Reply to Objection #1: _____

Reply to Objection #2: _____

Drafting

SYNTHESIZING YOUR THOUGHTS ON PAPER

Step 1

Your paper is a significant piece of writing that requires more than one introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Brainstorm how you want to develop the argument you've outlined in the previous steps. What major sections and subsections will you need to include? Is the order faithful to the logical flow of the argument you are building?

Step 2

Take the space you need in your notebook (roughly 2 pages) to develop an introduction for your paper. It should include the following, not necessarily in this order:

1. A clear thesis
2. A signposting paragraph that explains to readers the structure of your argument and how it will progress
3. A frame for understanding the significance of the question you are exploring and a broad introduction to the literature you are exploring to help answer it

Step 3

After you have roughly 1–2 pages of a coherent introduction, read it through. With a different color pen or writing utensil, mark up your writing. What wording works? Where does it cloud what you were trying to get across? Have you left out something important?

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Peer Review

DEVELOPING EVALUATIVE SKILLS

Step 1

Exchange papers with a partner. Read your partner's paper. As you go, annotate the paper. At this stage your annotations should not be grammatical comments – they should engage the conceptual framing and evidence presented in the argument.

Step 2

Write "reviewed by" and your name in your partner's notebook. Then answer the following:

1. What does this paper argue? How does it argue it?
2. Where does this paper have the strongest support?
3. Where does it have the weakest support?
4. Is each premise (look back to their argument map) clearly defended? Do the presented points necessitate the conclusion arrived at? Explain.
5. Include any other comments and concerns.

Step 3

Create a plan to address the concerns of your reviewer.

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1-on-1 Meeting + Stress Test

CULTIVATING HUMILITY AND HONESTY

Step 1 – Preparation

Answer the following questions to help you prepare for a 1-on-1 discussion with your instructor about your paper.

1. What has been the biggest struggle with the paper so far?
2. Are there any sources you want to integrate but are unsure of how to do that? Or, are there sources you have integrated and are unsure of?
3. Write a list of three, pointed questions you'd like feedback on from the instructor.

Step 2

Have a meeting with your instructor.

Step 3

Answer the following questions to help you prepare for a 1-on-1 discussion with your instructor about your paper.

1. What, so far, are you doing well?
2. What were the major insights or pieces of advice you took from the 1-on-1?
3. How do you plan to implement this feedback? What about your paper needs to be re-evaluated or thought through?

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