Common Core Writing Standards
Focus: Writing a Brief Research Paper

Overview

This brief research paper is designed to give 9th- and 10th-grade students a small exposure to the format of the research paper, the importance of citation and editing, and the value of exploring multiple sources.

Standards

- 9-10.W.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- 9-10.W.8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- 9-10.W.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
  - o b. Apply grades 9–10 reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., "Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning").
- 9-10.WS.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Objectives

- To narrow a research topic
- To synthesize a limited number of a variety of sources
- To filter and evaluate sources
- To write a thesis statement
- To cite sources properly
- To avoid plagiarism
- To draw a conclusion
- To produce a limited research paper

Materials

- Access to Internet sources and/or subscription sources
- Class notes/handouts on MLA and/or APA formats
- Outline forms
- Paraphrasing exercises
- Prepared source packets on one or more topics
- Access to library/librarian (optional)

Activity 1

Lecture

With the students' help, come up with a class definition of plagiarism. This must be guided so that it is complete enough. If the students have input, chances are they will understand it better and stick to it! It's theirs!)

That said, your students' definitions of plagiarism – and the consequences of committing plagiarism – obviously need to be consistent with the Nevada Honor Code:

Nevada Code of Honor
There is a clear expectation that all students will perform academic tasks with honor and integrity, with the support of parents, staff, faculty, administration, and the community. The learning process requires students to think, process, organize and create their own ideas. Throughout this process, students gain knowledge, self-respect, and ownership in the work that they do. These qualities provide a solid foundation for life skills, impacting people positively throughout their lives. Cheating and plagiarism violate the fundamental learning process and compromise personal integrity and one's honor. Students demonstrate academic honesty and integrity by not cheating, plagiarizing or using information unethically in any way. **What is cheating?** Cheating or academic dishonesty can take many forms, but always involves the improper taking of information from and/or giving of information to another student, individual, or other source. Examples of cheating can include, but are not limited to: • Taking or copying answers on an examination or any other assignment from another student or other source • Giving answers on an examination or any other assignment to another student • Copying assignments that are turned in as original work • Collaborating on exams, assignments, papers, and/or projects without specific teacher

permission
- Allowing others to do the research or writing for an assigned paper
- Using unauthorized electronic devices
- Falsifying data or lab results, including changing grades electronically

What is plagiarism?
Plagiarism is a common form of cheating or academic dishonesty in the school setting. It is representing another person's works or ideas as your own without giving credit to the proper source and submitting it for any purpose. Examples of plagiarism can include, but are not limited to:

- Submitting someone else's work, such as published sources in part or whole, as your own without giving credit to the source
- Turning in purchased papers or papers from the Internet written by someone else
- Representing another person's artistic or scholarly works such as musical compositions, computer programs, photographs, drawings, or paintings as your own
- Helping others plagiarize by giving them your work

All stakeholders have a responsibility in maintaining academic honesty. Educators must provide the tools and teach the concepts that afford students the knowledge to understand the characteristics of cheating and plagiarism. Parents must support their students in making good decisions relative to completing coursework assignments and taking exams. Students must produce work that is theirs alone, recognizing the importance of thinking for themselves and learning independently, when that is the nature of the assignment. Adhering to the Code of Honor for the purposes of academic honesty promotes an essential skill that goes beyond the school environment. Honesty and integrity are useful and valuable traits impacting one's life.

Questions or concerns regarding the consequences associated with a violation of the Code of Honor may be directed towards your child's school administration and/or the school district.

Most students will probably need to have some degree of clarification about the problem of "helping" others or "getting help from" others, or the issue of whether putting a source's ideas into your own words without citation is really plagiarism. (It is).

You may wish to give them some examples of what happens to those who cheat/skew data/plagiarize in college or in professional life. Have students publish and sign their class statement.

Many times, students will be concerned about inadvertent plagiarism. In that case, there's a nice, foolproof rule to teach: **When in doubt, cite**. The risk of students citing where they don't

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have to is that their teacher says, "Folks, you don't have to refer to this Wikipedia site when you told me the sky is blue; you don't have to cite common knowledge." The risks of not citing are obviously much worse.

Note: Schools may wish to use a plagiarism detection service such as Turnitin.com to prevent plagiarism from occurring and to ensure an objective identification of plagiarized material.

Summary, Paraphrase, Quotes, and Citation
Students generally need to learn the difference between summaries, paraphrases, and quotes. Generally, summaries are a "big-picture" overview; paraphrases are a rewording of a statement, and a quote is a direct statement of the speaker's actual words. The following may be helpful as an example.

Summary	Paraphrase	Quote
Hamlet speculates about the nature of death.	Hamlet argues that death is like a country whose visitors never come back.	"…th'undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns…"

If students are having a difficult time with these distinctions, teachers may need to practice by developing a chart like the one above with direct quotes but the "summary" and "paraphrases boxes left blank. Students can practice moving from specific (the quote) to more general (the paraphrase) and the most general (summary).

In all cases, however, students must accurately cite information using MLA style.

Citation
Citation is a beast of an issue, but here are two sites to make it all better:

- Knight Cite
- Son of Citation Machine

Both of these wonderful sites allow students to select the style manual they are going to use (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) and input the information about the type of resource they are citing (including websites and databases), the author's name, publication information, et cetera. Put it in, hit the button, and *voila*! They also demonstrate correct internal citation as well.

Activity 2 - The Topics

Present the topic(s) for research. For example, some topics might include the sanitizing of *Huck Finn*, personal electronic device use in the classroom, social networking, and cheating.

An excellent source for research topics to present to students as an initial introduction to the exercise might also be a scaled-down version of the Advanced Placement Language and Composition synthesis essay, which presents students with a topic, approximately 5-6 sources, and an opportunity to take a stand on an issue related to that topic.

AP Synthesis Essay Prompts

Teachers may want to scale these down or adjust according to the needs of the classroom, presenting students with 2-3 sources to synthesize rather than 5-6. This approach, in which the teacher provides the sources for students to use, is very helpful with first-time researchers (like freshmen and sophomores) who are still learning the ropes. For students who are adept at research, discuss ways in which they can use reliable resources to augment the sources the teacher provided.

The Librarian is Your Friend
The school or public librarian is often a fabulous resource for making students aware of the database resources the school or public library offers or other information. The librarian can help student narrow their searches, distinguish between credible and unreliable sources, or help them understand areas of a topic they may not have seen or understood before.

Help them narrow their search! If the students read and annotated the sources we gave them, they had some idea what they wanted to narrow their thesis to already; that is a huge time-saving lesson. We found that the students were more than willing to give advice to each other about the glut of information available. If your school has subscription services through your library, steer the students there.

Outlining
Students are going to want to skip this part, but as writing tasks become more complex, more time spent on developing a "game plan" is crucial.

The Outline is the Game Plan
Without a decent game plan, students flounder. Take time to walk students through the process of writing an outline. One fabulous resource is the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue, a site which helps explain and clarify outline use.

OWL Site - Online Writing Lab at Purdue

If students are doing a good job on the outline, it should not take long for one of them to say, "But I've practically written my paper!" Yep. That's the deal.

Conclusions

Spend time going over conclusions. Too many students have been told to restate their thesis or summarize their points. We get out our "soap box" and have some fun voting on who has the best message/lesson. This is fun if you have some dramatic students who like to share. It is effective in getting rid of the "in conclusion" or "this shows that" phrases from their papers.

Editing

Editing can always be a challenge particularly for students who are developing their own sense of style. One helpful resource is the following:

The Control-F Hit List

Having students run through the "hit list" helps them eliminate wordy forms of "to be," thus getting rid of weak verbs AND passive voice in one fell swoop. The Hit List also alerts students to the over-use of pronouns, thus nipping sentences like, "He told him what he had heard from him" in the bud.

When the first draft is due, hand out a rubric to each student and have a peer-editing day. If you have assigned different topics in each class, you may want to put those with the same topic in the same group because they will at least be familiar with the sources. This step will let the less-able writers see what their peers are doing. Have each student read at least two other papers and score them on the rubric you've created. This step will take a lot of supervision on your part—keep circulating and encouraging. (We allow constructive comments only, and each student MUST list three positive aspects of the paper before the constructive criticisms begin. The criticisms must begin with "This paper would be better if…")

Return all papers and criticisms to the owners. A second draft should be handed in (with all copies and rubrics and outlines and additional sources!) to you a few days later.

When you hand back the second draft, it would be a good idea to include a scoring rubric that you will use to grade the papers. (We put the point values next to each item we're checking— they seem genuinely surprised to see how much emphasis we place on the Works Cited page…)

When the final papers come in, be sure the students hand in all drafts, outline form, and a printed copy of their sources. If they're going to use this paper as a template for future endeavors, all pieces of it need to be kept together—it's easier if it's actually part of the grade!

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Conclusion

This lesson is good to give students a small "taste" of the tasks involved in research. Focus on the idea that research, like everything else, is a learned skill to be practiced and perfected over time. Stress that students' work can often be interesting and innovative or provide interesting viewpoints on even well-trodden issues.

Resources:

- **How to Write Stuff**
  http://www.atech.org/faculty/burke/WRITING/writingmain.html
  This helpful site is essentially a series of self-help guides from brainstorming through publishing, including information on how to outline, cite, and edit and how to write different kinds of essays.

- **The Mini-Research Paper**
  http://www.greenvalleyhs.org/library/Images/Posters/Mini-ResearchPaper.pdf
  This source is a good 'picture' of what an actual research paper should look like.   It is really short, fitting on one page—but everything's there!

- **Filtering Information**
  http://www.greenvalleyhs.org/library/Images/Posters/FilteringInformation.pdf
  This poster is a good summary for our information-glutted society.