

7. Criteria for doing research

Preparation

- Make sure you know what your subject implies. If not, ask your teacher.
- Formulate a number of key questions you want to find an answer to. Refer to these key questions in the further process of your work and modify them if necessary.
- Get a good overview of the subject. Begin with search engines such as Google, and talk to others about the project.
- Note: Wikipedia is a good way to get started, but do not base your research on it. (Not all contributions to Wikipedia are scientifically proven or completely reliable.)

Collecting material and sticking to the point

- Based on your key questions draw up a structure (or mind map) containing all the aspects of your task. Use this structure to find out which of the available materials are suitable.
- Bookmark Internet sites that you consider important.
- When using the Internet, do not follow every link but stick to your task.
- Look for keywords in the subject or in online library catalogues (in Berlin you will find them at www.voebb.de), skim through the bibliography of the books you have found and note down titles that sound relevant to your research. Do not hesitate to ask librarians to help you find relevant books.
- Refer to encyclopaedias to get general background information, to narrow down your topic and to check on information you are not sure about (see Tip 3).
- Get a first impression of the relevance of a text by scanning it for information you need.
- Consider additional sources of information (e.g. results from surveys, archives, embassies, companies, museums, experts).
- Do not get distracted but stick to the key question/s you have formulated.
- Make notes of relevant information. You can use index cards for this. Check the reliability of the information you have found.
- Always note down/copy the exact source of the information, quote, etc. (and in the case of Internet sources, the date you accessed them). Make sure your sources are up to date.

Putting your results together

- Use your structure to develop your line of argument and to focus on your most important results.
- Based on this structure select the material you are going to use.

Tip 5: Internet Research

- When using Internet sources be selective: Sites with domain name extensions such as edu (educational institution), gov (government), or org (non-profit organization) represent institutions and are in general reliable. But beware of possible political bias (e.g. on some government sites). Com sites can also have relevant information for your research topic/question but often they just contain advertising.
- If you want to limit your Internet research to English-speaking sources, click on options/search settings to choose the language.
- Use quotation marks (e.g. "History of the Big Apple") if you want to find the exact wording of a phrase on the Internet.

For further useful tips relating to doing research see "Criteria for preparing project work".

7.1 Self-assessment grid: doing research

You can use this self-assessment grid to evaluate your own contribution individually or your work as a group. While checking your progress and work, answer the questions below and tick:

😊😊 - well done 😊😊 - pretty good 😐😊 - OK, but needs some improvement 😐😐 - needs improvement

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Date:</i>				<i>Date:</i>				<i>Date:</i>			
	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊
	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊	😊😊
General rule												
I/We speak English throughout the whole work process.												
Preparation												
I/We have clearly defined the topic and formulated a number of key questions.												
I/We have gained a good overview of the topic.												
I/We have drawn up a structure containing all the aspects of the task.												
Collecting material												
I/We have drawn on different sources.												
I/We have selected only reliable sources.												
I/We have always noted down the exact sources of the information and in the case of Internet sources, given the date I/we accessed them.												
I/We have remained focused on my/our task and key questions.												
If the material was not relevant to the key questions I/we reconsidered our choice of material and/or modified our key questions.												
Whenever I/we needed to modify the key questions and/or the structure and/or had to reconsider the choice of material I/we made a note of this.												
I/We have kept a record of my/our results.												
Putting the results together												
I/We have developed a clear structure and line of argument and focused on the most important results.												
I/We have selected suitable material I/we are going to use.												
I/We have made sure this material suits the key questions and the structure of the task.												
I/We have used material reflecting diverse viewpoints and shown how it confirms or refutes them.												