The Research Paper

The research Project

The aim
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Types of research

Library research
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Surveys
Observation
Oral history

The research project

1. The aim
The aim of the research paper, which is a requirement in the second term of the academic year for the advanced students, and optional for the intermediate students, is to equip our students with the skills of conducting research. You learn to use various sources, and then put up all the data you have gathered into one meaningful whole and interpret the results. You also learn how to format papers, how to present information, how to cite works and write bibliographies. In short, you learn those skills when stakes are not too high. Starting with your freshman year, you will have to conduct research and will be graded on your work. In your prep year you can do that for practice purposes.

2. What can be done as research projects?
Lifting or plagiarism: A common problem in prep school is that students use material available on the internet, or in library books, copy information from these sources without any acknowledgement, modification, analysis or paraphrasing and submit the paper to their teachers. This practice is not legally or academically acceptable and students should in no way plagiarize. It is the same as stealing someone else’s work.

What topics lead to lifting: The most important step to avoid lifting is choosing the research question carefully. When the research question is not well formulated or when you go for information that can be found in encyclopedias, lifting becomes inevitable.

e.g. “The History of Prince Islands”
With a topic like this, you are bound to come up with encyclopedic information. As a prep school student, who is no expert in history, you cannot interpret the history of Prince Islands using the sources you have found. That means you are going to find some books from the library, visit a few websites, find a few tourist brochures, put them together and write a paper, which is 90% plagiarized.
e.g. “Environmental Pollution in the Mediterranean Region”
   Again such a topic is dangerous because 1. It is too broad as a topic, 2.
   It requires expert knowledge to interpret. Therefore, the result is going
   to be quoting one or two writers without even acknowledging the
   sources.

e.g. “The Komodo Monster” (which is my favorite example.)
   What can a student do about such a topic apart from consulting some
   encyclopedias or natural history books? A student of mine presented
   information in such a way that it looked like he himself had done all the
   studies in Malaysia jungles, observing the hunting habits of this
   monstrous lizard.

3. The correct research question:
A limited research question, that does not require expert knowledge or
complicated research techniques is ideal for you.

**Example 1:** An oral history project to be done with the residents of one of
the Prince Islands, for example with the storekeepers in Burgaz Ada, collecting
their memories about the Turkish writer Sait Faik Abasiyanik. Prep school students can handle a project of this size and scope, with
   • some reading about the life of S. F. Abasiyanik,
   • studying some oral history interview techniques
   • minimal knowledge of transcribing their interviews
   • making sense of the data they have gathered.

**Example 2:** Environmental pollution in YADYOK building or on BU
   campus.
   • setting the parameters of pollution
   • choosing some unobtrusive methods such as interviewing the
     personnel in charge of waste removal from the YADYOK building
   • interviewing the faculty secretary and the janitors, for instance,
   • reading some articles for theoretical background
   • reporting the results of research

**Types of research**
The research project can be of two types
   • Library research
   • Qualitative research

There are also quantitative methods of research; however, since prep
school students do not possess the required knowledge of statistics that
accompany that kind of research, we should make do with the two types
mentioned above.
Library research

As discussed above, library research, or in more modern form the Internet sources, usually takes the form of informative research, that is you gather information on a topic. A library research paper usually takes the form of the literature review paper.

Purpose of the literature review paper

The purpose of the literature review paper may be:

1. State-of-the-art review: What information exists on the topic? What are the current views/knowledge/theories/methods in the field?
   e.g. AIDS: What medical knowledge is there?
   What are the current methods of treatment?
   What drugs, medicine are used?
   What is the epidemiology of the disease?

2. Historical review: This review aims at revealing the history of the development of a topic.
   e.g. Theories of second language learning from past to present

3. Comparison of perspectives: the focus is on the comparison of theories, or approaches to an issue.
   e.g. Theories of second language learning compared and contrasted

How to conduct library research for literature review:

When looking for sources about a topic, you should consider the following issues:

- What information is available on the topic?
- What variables are there?
- Which of the variables have been studied?
- Which variables might be there in addition to those studied?
- What new information is there?
- What needs to be studied?
- What concepts/theories/studies constitute the fundamentals of the issue?
- What alternative theories are there?

While doing literature review, you may discover new areas to be studied and may modify your initial questions.

For a sample of a paper based on library research, see “Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings”

Qualitative research

Qualitative research may include such methods as:

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Observation
- Oral history
Such techniques are easier to use, do not require exact measurements or sophisticated statistical methods, and with right amount of guidance you can safely conduct research in the fields with which you are slightly familiar.

Qualitative research produces descriptive data based on the researcher’s observations or on the words of the people interviewed. Such data cannot be subjected to quantitative (statistical) analysis methods, but give in depth information on the subject studied.

1. Interviews
In order to learn the views, opinions, evaluations of people we conduct interviews. Interviews can be of two types:

- **Structured**
- **Unstructured**

In **structured interviews** you prepare a set of questions and try to obtain answers to these questions. Data analysis is easier because you have comparable categories for each respondent, and you can analyze what each respondent said as an answer to each question and compare and contrast their answers.

**Unstructured interviews**: You have the topic of the interview but no set questions to ask the interviewee. The interview may follow whatever course the interviewee chooses to talk about. Every subject may focus on a different aspect of the topic in question, and as a result data from individual subjects may not be comparable. On the other hand, such data provide in depth information in great detail about individual subjects.

For our own purposes, because we cannot expect our students to conduct case studies or personality analyses, structured interviews where the interviewer focuses on a set of predetermined questions, and tries to obtain answers to these questions are more feasible.

I. Finding subjects: The selection of subjects to be interviewed depends on the topic of study. However, there are certain guidelines the interviewer should not neglect:

1. Do not interview people you know well personally. In such cases, the subjects hesitate to open up and share their genuine opinions with the interviewer they know personally. The answers they give will be answers given to the person they know personally, not the answers they would give to an interviewer with whom they have no personal relations.

2. It is difficult to find the right people to interview. One way is using your contacts. If you know people who know the people you want to interview, use your contacts and get an introduction to those people.
3. If you have no contacts, you may go and contact directly the people you want to study. If you are lucky and approach the target group wisely, most people may agree to collaborate with you.

4. Always introduce yourself, tell your name, where you come from, your school, what your study is about, what you are trying to do. If necessary get a letter from your teacher describing your research study and introducing you.

II. The interview

- The interview should last as long as necessary for the interviewer to obtain the answers she needs, and for the interviewee to express her opinions adequately.
- If possible record the interview. To do the recording it is necessary to ask for the permission of the interviewee first.
- Make sure that all the preset questions are answered.
- Take extensive notes during the interview.

A soon as you get home, write down your impressions, comments, etc. before you forget them. It is a good idea to keep a research journal in which you record all your observations, questions, problems, and interpretations.

III. Tips on how to conduct an interview

Most people are happy to answer the questions asked by university students and welcome them, showing a cooperative attitude. However, there are a few guidelines every wise researcher must be careful about:

- Be respectful, friendly and accepting
- Don’t argue with your interviewees
- Don’t judge them as right or wrong
- Let them talk at their own speed, with their choice of topics.

Sometimes it may be necessary to guide the subjects into the topic of the interview, asking a few questions, clarifying points.

IV. Analysis of interviews

The data obtained during the interviews can be analyzed in two ways:

1. Each interview can be analyzed and reported as an individual case. The researcher summarizes the data, highlights certain points, lists points of importance, and draws conclusions.

2. Data from different interviews can be analyzed for comparative purposes, thus each respondent’s answers are classified and interpreted in terms of points of comparison, in terms of their attitude to certain topics. Their opinions, evaluations, responses are classified and then compared.

Depending on the topic of research, one of the two methods may be used.
2. Surveys

Surveys are one of the most frequently used methods of social research, and are used by the government, academic researchers in universities, campaign organizations, marketing researchers, opinion pollsters, and many similar groups.

All surveys aim to describe or explain the characteristics or opinions of a general population through the use of a representative sample.

You can conduct surveys of a smaller scale with a set of carefully designed questions. Examples of topics may be the leisure time activities of BU students or their attitudes towards current issues or their opinions on certain topics.

Comparative studies are also within the scope of such survey studies, e.g. comparison of the attitudes of BU students and ITU students.

The theory in survey method is that all subjects are asked the same questions in the same way, therefore a questionnaire must be prepared and a sample of the target group must be taken.

I. Sampling

The important principle you at this introductory level should know is that the sample should be representative of the population. For instance, if you want to study the BU students in general, the sample should not consist of prep students only, but should include students from each year of the university. Or if you target the students staying at the dorm, then you should not include those students who do not stay at the dorm.

II. Constructing the questionnaire

The most important point to be considered when designing a questionnaire is to construct the questions unambiguously and to be clear in mind about what the question is for, what it tries to find out or assess.

If you keep in mind these issues, questions will be well designed.
- What function does each question serve?
- What is the aim in asking this question?
- Is it relevant to the purpose of the study?

After formulating the questions, it is a good idea to test them on a few people. Other people may interpret the questions differently from the questionnaire writer. Therefore, if the questions are piloted before they are given to the target population, possible
misunderstandings and ambiguities in the questions may be remedied before they are actually used.

**Language of the questions:** Questions should be
- In the language of the target population
- Clear enough to be understood by the respondents
- Clear enough to bring out the information the researcher is looking for
- Worded as simply as possible

A good question does not lead the respondents or lead to ambiguity. e.g. “How many newspapers a day do you buy?” This question assumes that the respondents buy newspapers everyday. A better way to ask would be:
“Do you buy newspapers?”
If yes, “Do you buy newspapers every day?”
If yes, “How many newspapers a day do you buy?”

3. **Observation**
You can use observation technique to gather data on a topic of your choice. One simple example would be observing classroom behavior. Things to be observed could be “Are girls more active than boys?” or “How do teachers respond to disruptive behavior in class?”

I. **Conducting successful observations**
When making observations the important point is knowing what to observe. A lot of people look around in a classroom and see nothing unusual or nothing worth recording. However, to a trained eye there are patterns of behavior emerging, responses being given and themes forming. In order to make successful observations:
1. Decide what behavior to observe
2. Decide how you will make the observation: with the help of a checklist or unstructured observation. In either way, the researcher starts with a set of questions.
3. Choose a setting: decide where you will observe the group you have selected
4. Look carefully
5. Make notes while you are observing the target group
6. Evaluate your notes immediately after you finish your observation
7. Analyze your data

If we go back to the initial example of “How do teachers respond to disruptive behavior in class?”
1. You decide what constitutes disruptive behavior, e.g. students talking among themselves, not responding to the teacher, doing other things in class, coming to class late, etc.
2. Decide how you will do the observation: In class, from beginning to the end of the lesson, how many hours
3. Decide where the observation will take place: In which school, in which class, etc.
4. Decide whether to make notes or use a check list

II. Data analysis

- Data can be analyzed in terms of the frequency of occurrence of the behavior or the emergence of themes and patterns.

  e.g. Disruptive behavior study
  - How many times each type of behavior occurred
  - How the teachers responded and with what frequency

- Another approach may be just going to the class, watching carefully what is going on during the lesson between the teacher and the students, seeing what the teacher considers as disruptive behavior and recording the behavior and how disruptions are treated by the teacher. Data analysis of such an observation will be more in a case study or narrative format.

  e.g. Study on disruptive behavior in class

  “In a class a student who had a leading role among his classmates was hostile towards the class teacher. He tried to make all the jokes himself and wanted to get a good laugh from the class. When the teacher tried to make a joke, the student tried to stop his classmates from laughing at the teacher’s jokes, thus preventing them from forming an alliance with the teacher.”

Observation, be it structured or unstructured, may produce many interesting results and can also teach you to really look at things happening in your surroundings and see patterns, themes and order in what seems to be chaotic. Observation can also produce further research questions and is conducive to formulating further research projects.

4. Oral History

Different from written history, which records global events and changes of historical importance, oral history concerns itself with the experiences, memories, and evaluations of individuals. These individual recollections also constitute a part of history and are of significant importance because they bear witness to events from the viewpoint of the individual members of the society. With the spread of recording machines and the Internet, oral history studies which focus on the experiences and personal accounts of individuals gained themselves a niche in keeping records of the present and the past for the future generations.
“We all have stories to tell, stories we have lived from the inside out. We give our experiences an order. We organize the memories of our lives into stories.

Oral history listens to these stories. Oral history is the systematic collection of living people’s testimony about their own experiences. Historians have finally recognized that the everyday memories of everyday people, not just the rich and famous, have historical importance. If we do not collect and preserve those memories, those stories, then one day they will disappear forever.

Your stories and the stories of the people around you are unique, valuable treasures for your family and your community. You and your family members can preserve unwritten family history using oral history techniques. Likewise you and your community can discover and preserve unwritten history large and small. Oral history is so flexible that people of all ages can adapt the techniques of asking and listening to create and learn about history and historical narratives.”

Moyer (1999, Step by Step Guide to Oral History)

A useful link where you can find all basic information on how to conduct oral history studies is:

http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

With knowledge of simple techniques of asking questions and recording the data, you too can employ oral history methods to record the recollections of people.

e.g. Oral history project in Arnavutkoy: "Arnavutkoy past and present, neighborly relations in the past and the present."

A group of advanced students in spring 2004 conducted such a study in Arnavutkoy. The steps were as follows:

- They started to read about the past of the neighborhood, and as they read on they came up with more questions
- They contacted the neighborhood NGO (Arnavutkoy Semt Girisimi), and started talking with them about the looming danger of the third bridge across the Bosphorus.
- They contacted the local residents
- They started to gather information about which local residents are knowledgeable about the past of the neighborhood
- They conducted interviews with these old residents and video recorded the interviews
- They took pictures of the neighborhood residents and the key architectural spots
As can be seen, such a project involves the following steps:

- Background reading
- Setting up the research topic
- Setting up the interview questions to focus on
- Finding people
- Conducting interviews
- Recording the interviews
- Evaluation of the data

For sample research papers based on oral history technique, see “Arnavutkoy: Past and Present” and “Sutluce”.

Internet links and resources
1. Purdue University OWL has excellent handouts for
   - Research Skills and Resources and Writing Research Papers
   - Evaluating Sources of Information
   - Searching the World Wide Web
   - Writing research papers: A step-by-step guide

2. Colorado State University Writing Center has a good guide to the World Wide Web
   and Documentation APA, MLA and other style manuals

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