



THE MOUNGER '48 WRITING CENTER

JEFFERSON HALL
SECOND FLOOR (NE)

E/F/K/L (Mon-Fri, 1400-1600)
ESP (Sun-Thurs, 2000-2200)

Appointments preferred;
walk-ins welcome. Get more info
& schedule today:

usma.mywconline.com

We offer regular one-on-one consultations and periodic group workshops to cadets working on writing tasks for all academic courses; all sessions are led by Cadet Writing Fellows who have excelled in their writing at West Point. Writing Fellows are trained to help you with any part of the writing process: brainstorming ideas; clarifying focuses; developing theses; organizing arguments; analyzing, integrating, and documenting sources; refining your style; revising and polishing drafts. Bring in work for courses in the humanities and social sciences as well as your scientific and technical writing—lab reports, memos, executive summaries, even writing for oral presentation. We can also talk with you about writing for personal interests and professional opportunities. **The sooner you come in, the more we can help!**

BEAT THE RESEARCH PAPER

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION

CDT Vincent Vu ('17)

Beginning with your Plebe English and History classes and continuing throughout your time at West Point, research papers will be a constant presence in your life, regardless of whether you major in the humanities and social sciences or in math, science, and engineering. I've found it can be easy to become overwhelmed by a research paper assignment: deciding what to write about, finding enough sources, and meeting the word count is a time-consuming process. The temptation to dive immediately into writing your research paper, hoping that it will make sense as you go along, is strong. Yet this mindset has victimized me and others time and again: usually it leads to stressful late nights, where students 'plan' as they write, and ultimately the results are often sub-standard. To avoid such fates, take the time up front to develop your research question. With this finely focused, you will create a roadmap for writing your research paper more effortlessly and effectively than you ever thought possible.



First step: Come to the Writing Center and Library!

By coming to Jefferson Hall early in your writing process, you'll see better results. Even before you have written an outline, coming in to talk with librarians (including those who specialize in your subject area) about the resources you could consider will get you on the right path. Similarly, booking an appointment at the Writing Center and bringing in just the assignment guidance, some sources, any notes you've taken, and some initial ideas can be extremely effective. We'll more than happy to help you brainstorm ideas and build the foundations of your paper in order to get ahead in the end.

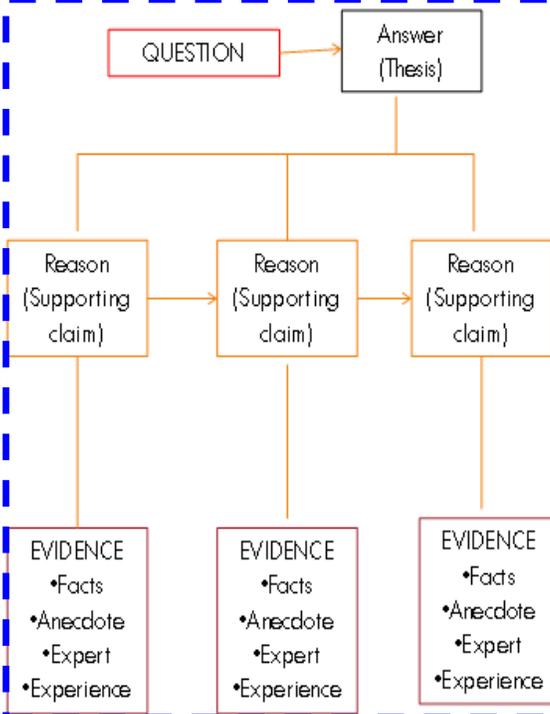
Always Ask “Why?”

Map Out Your Research Paper.

The *planning process* (see “Always ask “Why”) is most useful when you can visualize the path your paper will take. Consider a graphic like this to get started...



To determine your research question, examine the topic you’ve been assigned (or are interested in!) and find a concept or event that you want to explain that pertains to it. For example, if you’re writing a research paper on the Civil War, a possible research question you could answer in your paper is: “Why did the Union win the Civil War?” Actually, that question might be too broad—depends on your assignment. (Always make sure your question is narrow enough to be explored thoroughly in the space you have.) Regardless, the point is this: **questions that begin with “why” prompt you to make an argument by supporting your answer to your research question.** Thus, avoid starting your research question with “who,” “what,” or “when” because the answers to those questions will be facts that you cannot make an argument out of.



Use Your Research Question Throughout the Process

Your research question should inspire the rest of your research paper. It will be the foundation upon which you build your paper: your answer to your research question becomes your *thesis*; the reasons you use to support your answer become the topics for your body paragraphs; and the evidence you find through your research to prove your thesis will be analyzed by you, the writer, in your body paragraphs. It is also possible to plan your paper in the opposite direction: you can extrapolate related pieces of evidence found in your research (using resources from the library) to support a statement that could be used to answer a research question. Either way, you’ll be developing a logical, relevant argument.



Remember: Planning Is ESSENTIAL...

especially when writing papers that tend to be broad in scope and require many hours to research. Formulating a concise, viable research question at the outset is crucial to narrowing your work and determining your thesis statement. Knowing the premise and rough organization of your paper before you write it will set you on the path to crafting a logical, well-supported, and compelling essay. **Good luck!**