English 301: September 2014
Dr. Erika Paterson

Finding a topic for your Formal Report and submitting a Research Proposal

The formal report project is a major component of English 301. Like the Web Folio project, the formal report is an assignment that is ongoing and should be approached methodically in stages—incrementally—rather than all at once.

One of the most important aspects to keep in mind about the report as a written form, is that it is NOT an essay. It is a genre of writing with conventions and stylistic practices (such as headings and subheadings, bullets and lists, preview statements, illustrations and tables, supplements, and appendices) that you need to study carefully, learn, and practice.

As you can see from the many examples of Formal Reports in our textbook [pages 510 – 554] there are a number of ways to approach a Formal Report. It is up to you to decide if your report will be a "comparative report", or a "feasibility report", or a "causal report. This decision will be based on the topic you choose.

 The first stage in the creation of your own report, and a most important one at that, is the choosing of an original topic *particular to your own experience and researchable through objective observation, interviews, and/or surveys.*

For the report project, it's advisable to choose a topic based in your own current or very recent experience in the workplace, the community, or the classroom. The topic needs first to be one that will lend itself **to the problem/solution pattern** of organization typical of report writing that you will see in the sample reports in our text.

Your topic must also be one that you will be able to research, to measure, and to document—not in the library or on the Internet—but in the real-world location where it exists. Real-world research *involves such activities as interviews, surveys, photographs and on-site observations; it involves the actual naming and describing in detail of the single, particular organizatio*n you are studying. And, most important is consideration for the audience for *your* report. You are NOT writing this report for your instructor – but rather you need to define your audience and address their specific needs.

NOTE that you need to provide in the memo you will submit this week the specific name and location of the site you are planning to study. If you are unable for any reason to do so, then you should look for another topic and another site to study.

Just below, to give you an idea of what other students have done, you will see the specific original topics developed by students in English 301 classes. Your topic will need to be one that is original and specific to your own experiences; it should NOT

be a topic pursued by students who have taken the course before you. Following this list of topics tackled by students before you, you will find six tips for determining your own specific ideas for report topics—tips developed in conversations with students and colleagues about the report project over the past several years.

Keep these tips in mind as you develop your research proposal.

STUDENTS' REPORT TOPICS:

- Reducing the use of paper at the UBC Recreation unit
- Streamlining the inventory process at the UBC-Vancouver Bookstore
- Increasing the donation of work boots to the Work Gear Clothing Society, Vancouver ***
- Improving information management practices at the Dreamloka Photo Studio, Vancouver ***
- Resolving Staffing Shortages at the UBC-Vancouver Aquatic Centre
- Improving Traffic Control and Parking Regulations at the Vine Community and Housing Development, Vancouver BC***
- Increasing Customer Volume at Earls Restaurant, White Rock, BC • Developing Ergonomic Programs for Injury Prevention at Cube Contracting Company, Surrey
- Promoting E-business at Travellers Guarantee Insurance Company of BC
- Increasing Sales Promotion of Pet One Dog Food, Taipei, Taiwan
- Streamlining Marketing Practices of the UBC Science Students' Society
- Recruiting Volunteer Lawyers for Access Pro Bono Legal Services of Vancouver, BC
- Improving Environmental Practices at the West Vancouver Medical Office of Dr. W. Smith
- Improving the Office of Learning Technology's Promotion of Courses to UBC Students***
- Reducing Chemical Exposure for Employees at the Granville Island Veterinary Hospital***
- Implementing a Gluten-Free Menu at Bernoulli's Bagels, UBC Student Union***
- Improving the Reporting of Weather and Snow Conditions at Mount Seymour Ski Facility
- Improving the Promotion of Civic Events by the City of Coquitlam
- Enhancing the Participation of UBC Students in Worlds AIDS Day ***

• Enabling Wheelchair Access to the Starbucks Coffee Shop in the Marketplace, UBC Campus***

*** The topics marked with *** yielded the strongest and best reports

And now for six tips to consider in arriving at your own original ideas for specific topics suited to this project.

- Choose a topic that will engage your own interest over the 13 weeks of the course.

- Choose a topic that will enable you to draw upon your own very recent experiences in your workplace, your community, or your learning institution.

- Avoid a topic calling for library or internet research rather than research in an actual workplace, campus space, or community space. *Avoid topics dealing with personal grooming or how-to processes. These are unsuited to the formal report.*

- Consider the recommended length for the project [12 – 15 pages total], and note that the topic you choose should be narrowed and sharpened enough to fit the length. Aim to look at only two or three aspects of a single notable problem or inefficiency. In your research proposal, you will need to identify the problem, describe its two or three principal aspects, describe and analyze them, and recommend workable and cost-effective solutions.

- Avoid using this report to criticize individuals in an organization. Such criticism is not professional or appropriate. Instead, look dispassionately at problems with systems and procedures that allow for cost-effective solutions.

- Choose a topic that will lend itself well to the use of graphics and illustrations. You will be expected to integrate into your report relevant photographic images, tables, and charts.

I hope that these tips and suggestions will prove useful to you as you work to produce your research proposal for your Formal Report