**Topic Vetting – Sustained Investigation**

***Rationale:*** Recently we have been working on topic selection and question development. It is important that you expand your thinking to encompass the incredible variety of possibilities. However, it is also important that you eventually focus onto one feasible and exciting relevant topic. In this activity you will take your top 3 topics, hopefully decide which one is best, and refine that question.

***Steps Of This Assignment:***

1. ***List Your Questions →***For this activity, you will choose your best 3 questions. Make a copy of this document and then write each question in the space provided on the following pages.
2. ***Give Each Question a Preliminary Grade For Each Aspect:*** Your grades can be based on whatever criteria you decide, we suggest: A+, A, B, C… as well as “?” or “unknown”.
3. ***Test Your Questions:***In class we will run as many tests as we can for each aspect of each question. You may not get to test them all, so consider testing the aspects you feel most unsure about. See the protocols on the next page. Make sure to take detailed notes about the results from each test.
4. ***AFTER feedback from classmates, Give Each Question a Final Grade For Each Aspect:***Use your feedback/comment notes. Again, the grades you give the aspect of each question will not be reflected in your grade on this assignment.
5. ***Reflect:*** When you have finished testing all aspects of all topics, please take some time to write a reflection about what the tests revealed for each question. The following should be discussed.
6. Why you are considering this question? (What inspired you and attracts you to it?)
7. What could make this question an excellent choice for 5 months of research.
8. What could make this topic difficult to work with?
9. What feedback did you receive that was highly valuable?
10. What types of research methods might you apply to this topic?
11. How might this question be refined to improve its grade?

***ASPECTS EXPLAINED***

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| **Aspect** | **Suggested Test Protocols** |
| **Scope/Focus:**Is your focus too broad? Is it too narrow? Remember, when crafting your topic, you will be adjusting this a lot, but it should be in the right “ballpark” for now. The scope should be narrow enough that it is approachable, but broad enough that it warrants the time you will spend. | * Brainstorm-In/Out
* Mind Map
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| **Personal Interest:**Why do you care? You are going to be working with this topic for 5+ months, you had better not get sick of it. A common mistake is to choose a topic you think teachers and judges will be impressed with, but one that you are not passionate about. | * Psychological Interview
* Critical Friend Chat
* Mind Map
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| **Feasibility:**Do you have the ability to study this topic? Do you have access to the information needed? Do you have the capability to take your own source photos for this topic or (better yet) access your subject matter to work from observation? | * Mind Map
* Critical Friend Chat
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| **Originality:**Have you identified the unique way you can explore this topic? It is very common for a researcher to come up with an amazing question, only to find out others have already researched or explored the topic in detail. Don’t worry! If you move your focus just a little bit, you can use that similar research to help “frame the gap”. | * Mind Map
* Critical Friend Chat
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***PROTOCOLS***

**BRAINSTORM IN/OUT:** Write your current topic in the middle of a document and make a Concept map/Mind Map by branching out with either more specific topics, or (less likely) more broad topics. You might see a concept in your brainstorming that makes more sense in terms of scope than your original idea does.

**CRITICAL FRIEND CHAT:**Pull someone aside for a quick 5 minute chat. This should be someone you trust and have a good rapport with. Ask them to criticize your topic and play “devil’s advocate” with it. They should be arguing reasons why your topic does *NOT* meet the aspect you are trying to test. You should be defending your topic. If you feel like you can answer most of their criticisms, (even if you think of the defense after the talk), you probably have a good topic.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVIEW**: Have a friend you trust sit with you and ask you questions about how your topic connects to you personally. They should try to get deeper and deeper into your personality and your values. This can get quite personal so pick someone you trust. Often you will discover what is at the root of your interest and you might change your entire topic to get closer to that core value or interest.