How to Find a Research Question

Unit Targets: Students will produce an argumentative research paper that responds to either a practical or a conceptual problem.

Accommodations/Modifications: Seating arrangement and group choices made based on individual needs.

Materials/Resources Needed:
- Student questions in T-Q-S format, compiled into a master list (See Activities, Step One), one copy for each student
- Student’s Guide to Writing College Papers, Chapters One and Two: “What Researchers Do and How They Think about It” (for review) and “Two Kinds of Research Questions” (homework)
- TCC Topic sheet 2 (“Choosing a Topic: Research Questions”): at least one copy for each student, plus extras for the second day of class. (http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/tcc/topicsheet2.pdf)
- TCC Topic sheet 6 (“Finding a Research Question”: at least one copy for each student. (http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/tcc/topicsheet6.pdf)

Activities:
1. **Distribute TCC Topic sheet 2** for reference and **assign students to formulate three questions** about an issue or a reading using the T-Q-S (topic-question-significance) procedure outlined in the topic sheet (or it can also be found in Student’s Guide 1.1, p 13). It is easiest if you have students e-mail their questions to you the afternoon or evening before class.

2. **Compile the questions into a list.** Add any questions that students do not propose but you would like them to consider.

3. **In class, distribute the master list and divide students into groups.** Have each group discuss the potential significance of questions they are interested in. Each group should pick the three or four questions they think are most promising, revising any part of the T-Q-S as they see fit.

4. **Reconvene the class and compile a list of the questions chosen by each group.** As a group proposes a question, ask them to explain why they selected it. Keep track of
questions selected by more than one group and patterns of reasoning for preferring certain questions over others.

5. **Choose discussion questions or paper topics from the shortlist of questions.** For discussion, students can vote on which question to discuss or debate and then start in right away. For paper topics, compile a new master list of the questions students preferred and veto questions likely to give students too much trouble.

5. **Closure—** Pass out TCC Topic sheet #6 and discuss guidelines for choosing, vetoing, and narrowing research questions. Assign *Student’s Guide* Chapter 2 as homework.

**Input:** Students will likely struggle with significance and scope, and with reformulating questions on their own. They might also need extra guidance in identifying unsuitable research questions.

**Independent Practice:** Have students read Chapter Two of *Student’s Guide* as homework. If the students are choosing research topics from these questions, have them pick a question and begin “questioning their own question” using 2.3.1 (pp 32-33) as a guide.

**Objective/Purpose:** This activity would work well as a follow-up to Chapter One of *Student’s Guide* and in preparation for Chapter Two. Students will need to be familiar with T-Q-S before doing this activity, which will allow them to practice generating and evaluating questions for conceptual problems. It primes them both for class discussion and for choosing research topics, ensuring that they see themselves as responding to a real and immediate audience.

**Illinois Common Core ELA:**

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 (a-e)** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2b** Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a
problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**NCTE Standards 7 and 12:**

- Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. (7)
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (12)