

Research, Writing, and Planning Practice

On a piece of paper...

- Write down one important question you have about human settlements—something that led you to be here today and study planning

Some Important Concepts

- Inquiry
- Observation
- Evidence
- Research

What is inquiry?

- Asking questions
- Examining facts, issues, phenomena
- What are the planning questions that brought you here today?

What is observation?

- Taking the world in through our senses
- Noting something, taking account
- What are some important things to observe when it comes to your important planning questions?

What is evidence?

- What we use to answer our questions
- Proof of conclusions
- Separate from tradition or authority?

- What would you accept as evidence for your important planning questions?

Research

- Lots of human activities involve questions, observations, and evidence
- What makes research different?

Research

- What makes research different?
- Research is systematic, methodological, rigorous
- Research is deliberate
- Research is done with a critical eye—healthy constructive nay saying

Research

- Why is research important for planners?
- The stakes are high
 - Health, safety, welfare, livelihoods
- The costs are high
- “Trust me--I’m a planner”
- Why is research writing important for planners?

Research

- What kinds of research will you be doing as a student?
- As a planner?

Secondary Research Writing

- Using existing literature, studies, and other materials to answer a question
- Like with other research it should also be:
 - Systematic, Methodological
 - Deliberate
 - Done with a critical eye
- Clue the reader into all of these

Secondary Research Writing

- Be clear about goal of writing → for yourself, for your audience
 - From this point on, goal of research writing is not to show how much you know about a topic or summarize all you read (Don't annoy your boss)
 - Goal is to answer a specific question; or leverage evidence to make a point; or ask a new question about a topic
- Be clear about your method
 - How did you approach your question, how did you choose your sources?
 - What can you answer, what can't you, limitations

Be a critical consumer of research

- How to choose sources?
 - Peer reviewed journals
 - Professional reports
 - Organization websites
 - Primary documents
 - Journalist articles
 - The weird dude in my neighborhood
 - Random websites Google turns up

Be a critical consumer of research

- Questions to ask yourself:

General:

- What kind of evidence is relevant to my question?
- What sources are likely to have that evidence?

About sources:

- What is used as evidence?
- What was the method? Was it appropriate? Was it appropriate for your question?
 - **Wikipedia doesn't let you know any of this
- What sources do you give more weight to?
- Definition (Operationalization) of problem, evidence?

Finding sources

- What databases have you used in the past?
- Searches are an art (a methodological, deliberate art)
 - Refinement
 - Narrowing
 - Trial and error

Finding sources

- How many sources are enough?
- In grad school as with a professional career, there is no easy answer or magic number
- Depends on the gravity of the question
- Good to use the “law of diminishing returns”
 - After you have answered your question comfortably (given the gravity of the question) and additional sources are only confirming what you already know.
 - Pays to be clear and precise about your question

Getting started

- The dreaded blank page and the desire to fill it
- Good writing is good thinking (both take practice)
 - Begin by articulating the goal, the question
 - Why are you asking it, what do you hope to achieve
 - How did you go about it?
 - What did you find?
 - What questions remain?