

Unit 3 Mini-Research Project

Developing an Argument

As a student in AP African American Studies, you will embark on an Individual Student Project (ISP) for which you research a topic of your choosing related to the course content. That research will require you to:

1. Identify a specific topic of research and develop a guiding research question.
2. Select four related primary and secondary sources and assess them for relevance, reliability, and credibility.
3. Analyze the sources to develop your own perspective on the topic and build a cogent argument around claims and evidence.
4. Present and defend your analysis of the sources.

The Project

To prepare to complete the ISP, you will conduct mini-research projects for each unit. The Unit 3 Mini-Research Project focuses on the third step in the ISP process.

Assignment: Analyze the sources to develop your own perspective on the topic and build a cogent argument around claims and evidence.

Analyzing sources, developing a perspective, and building a cogent argument requires multiple intermediary steps. This activity will help break down some of those steps for you to better prepare you to complete the ISP. To do so, you may select a new research topic from Unit 3 to investigate, perhaps from those recorded in your Research Journal. However, if you do so, you will need to begin from the ground up, repeating the steps you have already completed in the Unit 1 and Unit 2 Mini-Research Projects. To save time, you may want to continue developing one of the topics you already revised and devised a research question for and began selecting and evaluating research sources for.

Analyzing Sources

This activity begins with the presumption that you have already completed the steps from the Unit 1 and Unit 2 Mini-Research Projects. That means you have identified a research topic, written and revised a research question, and selected and evaluated four relevant, credible, and reliable resources to analyze. (That analysis will be the foundation of your argument.) Begin by recording that date in the chart below:

Research Topic:	
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Name _____ Date _____

Research Question:	
Research Sources:	

Again, be sure to record sufficient detail (e.g., title of the source, author or maker, date of production or publication, and publication, publisher, collection, or other relevant identifying information) for each source. You may want to refer to the APA or MLA style guides to begin practicing appropriate citation formats.

Next, you want to read or study, annotate, and analyze your four sources. For each source, copy and complete the chart on a separate sheet of paper or in your Research Journal.

Source:	
Summary or description (including type of source):	
Relevance to research topic:	
Details that support a response to the research question:	

How the source supports, refutes, or otherwise relates to the research question:	
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Developing a Perspective

To prepare a research paper that analyzes sources on a particular topic, you must go a step beyond summarizing and describing sources and their content. Analyzing sources means thinking critically about them. You look for connections and patterns in the source material and assess how the sources relate to your topic to form a particular perspective, which you will articulate in your argument.

To begin developing that perspective, look back over your notes for the four sources. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper or in your Research Journal:

1. How do these sources affect my understanding of the topic?
2. How are these sources similar in their content and perspective?
3. How are these sources different in their content and perspective?
4. Which sources are most relevant, credible, and reliable, and why?
5. How do these sources equip or guide me to answer my research question?
6. What concerns, if any, do I have about these sources?
7. What connections, patterns, or conclusions do these sources support?

Writing a Thesis Statement

An argument uses a line of reasoning to connect defensible claims to specific and relevant evidence. It reflects your overall perspective, or way of thinking, about a topic.

To build an argument, you first need to write a thesis statement. A thesis statement is a clear, focused, arguable sentence that tells the reader your main idea or position. It answers the question: What am I trying to prove, explain, or argue?

A thesis statement should

- be easy to understand,
- answer your research question,
- be specific, or focused on a central idea,
- present a position that is arguable, and
- set up the argument for your paper.

Name _____ Date _____

Often, you can use your research question as a model for writing your thesis statement since your thesis statement should answer the research question.

Consider this sample thesis statement:

How did Black women's clubs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contribute to the foundation of the early civil rights movement in the United States?

You might reach different conclusions in response to that question based on the sources used, but a reasonable thesis statement uses the bones of the question.

Study this model format:

Black women's clubs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the foundation of the early civil rights movement in the United States by ____.

Completing that statement with verbal phrases that explain how Black women's clubs contributed to early civil rights efforts produces a viable thesis. You would use the information gleaned from your sources to fill in the missing explanation.

Think about this sample completed thesis statement:

Black women's clubs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the foundation of the early civil rights movement in the United States by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

It answers the question and is arguable. However, it's a little long, and words like *contributed to* are vague. Was it a helpful contribution? You can revise a draft thesis statement to use more precise or compelling language. You can also trim out unnecessary qualifiers. For instance, Black women's clubs formed and were especially active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is also a formative time for early civil rights efforts. It may not be necessary to specify that time frame.

Check out these revised thesis statements:

Black women's clubs laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

Black women's clubs helped launch civil rights efforts by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

Black women's clubs galvanized civil rights efforts by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

Name _____ Date _____

Both are a little clearer and more concise, but they have slightly different meanings that may reflect nuanced analysis of source materials.

In contrast, you may be tempted to write a simple and generalized response to your research question, such as the following:

Black women's clubs were integral to the formation of the civil rights movement.

This statement answers the original research question but in a bland and unfulfilling way. It's not very specific and doesn't evoke specific details to be argued and supported with evidence from the sources. When you start with a simple thesis statement like this, consider asking yourself *How?* or *Why?* to develop it more. In this case, asking *How?* will lead you back to one of the preceding sample statements.

Now, you try. In the space below, record your research question. Then, consider notes and your answers to the analysis questions, particularly your responses to Questions 1, 5, and 7. Then, try rewrite your research question as a declarative sentence that answers the question using what you have learned from the sources.

Research Question:



Draft Thesis Statement:

Great! Now, let's revise it. Almost all first thesis statements can be tweaked and improved. Answer these questions about your statement:

	If not, ...
Does it answer the research question?	Look at the research question again. Break it down into parts. What part is missing? How can you adjust the statement to include that part?
Is it focused, specific, and compelling?	• Ask yourself qualifying questions like <i>How?</i> and <i>Why?</i> to see if you can refine the statement with more details. • Consider other types of qualifying information, such as the time, location, or individuals or groups involved. For example, does your argument relate to the United States, to a region, or to cities? Does it relate to all women, to Black women, to urban Black women, to unmarried Black women, or to middle-class Black women? You don't want to get too specific, but you want to provide enough information to

	reflect the thrust of your argument and the content of the sources. • Review the words you used. Are they ambiguous or too general, like <i>contributed to</i>? Can you make them more precise? Use a thesaurus to trigger ideas.
Is it clear and arguable?	• Reread the sentence. If it goes on and on, with many clauses and phrases, you might want to see what information is superfluous. Cut the extras out if they aren't necessary to aid understanding or to focus your ideas. You might also consider whether you utilize words that you think elevate your prose but only serve to obfuscate your meaning. For example, the preceding sentence might read more clearly with a few simple revisions: You might also consider whether you use words that you think sound professional but just obscure your meaning. • Consider whether your statement presents established facts or simplistic descriptions and explanations. If someone isn't likely to argue the point, then you need to think more carefully about your perspective. • Again, asking questions like <i>Why?</i> and <i>How?</i> can help refine your position.
Do your sources support it?	• Always review your thesis statement to be sure it reflects what you learned from your sources. You have to build an argument with evidence from those sources. • If you have doubts, review your sources. What are the main takeaways? Work those into your thesis statement.

Revise your thesis statement a few times on a separate sheet of paper or in your Reading Journal. You may come up with two to three that you like. Circle the one you like best for now and write it below but keep in mind that you can continue to adjust your thesis as you develop your argument and write your paper.

Also, you want to include your thesis statement in your introductory paragraph (toward the end of the paragraph) to set up your argument. However, you will probably want to restate your thesis in your concluding paragraph, so having a few options may be helpful.

Revised thesis statement:

Outlining Claims and Evidence

The thesis statement forms the central idea of your research paper. However, you still need to write a paper explaining and defending that position. The argument in your paper is built around supporting claims and evidence. Often the structure of your thesis provides the supporting claims for which you then need to explain evidence from the sources.

Consider this revised sample thesis statement from above:

Black women's clubs helped launch civil rights efforts by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

The phrases that explain *how* Black women's clubs helped launch early civil rights efforts provide supporting claims that can be addressed individually. They provide a means of structuring your line of reasoning and building your argument. Before you begin writing your research paper, start by outlining your argument based on your thesis.

Check out this sample outline:

I. Introduction

- a. An interesting hook (e.g., an anecdote, compelling data, a quote from a source) related to the topic to gain your reader's interest
- b. Brief historical context
- c. Thesis statement: Black women's clubs helped launch civil rights efforts by organizing community support, promoting education, and challenging racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

II. Supporting Claim 1: Black women's clubs organized community support.

- a. Evidence from source
- b. Evidence from source
- c. Evidence from source

III. Supporting Claim 2: Black women's clubs promoted education.

- a. Evidence from source
- b. Evidence from source
- c. Evidence from source

IV. Supporting Claim 3: Black women's clubs challenged racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level.

- a. Evidence from source
- b. Evidence from source
- c. Evidence from source

V. Synthesis: You should include a paragraph that connects your supporting claims and the main thrust of your thesis statement. In this case, you provided evidence that Black women's clubs organized community support, promoted education, challenged racial and gender inequality at the grassroots level. Now you want to explain how those

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actions advanced early civil rights efforts. You may provide specific examples and further evidence.

- a. How organizing community support advanced civil rights efforts
- b. How promoting education advanced civil rights efforts
- c. How grassroots challenges to racial and gender inequality advanced civil rights efforts

VI. Counter-Arguments: You may encounter information in your sources that refute your position. If so, consider including a paragraph in which you summarize and respond to counter-arguments.

- a. Explanation of significant counter-argument
- b. Response to counter-argument (e.g., why it's incorrect, incomplete, or less important than your main point)
- c. Evidence to support your response

VII. Conclusion

- a. Restatement of thesis
- b. Reflection on significance of topic
- c. Connection to broader issues in the field or current events

Using the outline above as a guide, build an argument for your thesis statement by outlining claims and evidence on a separate sheet of paper or in your research journal.

Reflection on the Activity

How do you feel about the research process so far? What questions do you have? What elements of this process have worked well for you? Explain whether you feel confident in your ability to conduct your own research project and why or why not.