

Sample Preliminary Report Outlines

This presents three different sample outlines for the Preliminary Research Report, using different research topics presented in an earlier English 102 class (April 2011). I have edited the outlines somewhat, mostly by re-arranging ideas into the appropriate section (for example, moving some questions out of III and moving them into III or vice versa).

After the examples I present a brief review of style/voice—in other words, how to write up your information in each section, by demonstrating how you might begin each section.

In these examples section I and II present questions that the Preliminary Report would *answer*. For example, the first paper would explain who was affected by Katrina, what Katrina was, and so on. Section III presents questions that the Preliminary Report would *not answer* but would *describe*. For example, the first paper would point out that experts are still debating whether the Army Corps of Engineers was negligent. You don't have to answer these questions in your report, just mention what a few such questions are.

In these examples section IV looks at possible answers to the research question. In your actual paper you'll present one answer—the one you think is best—and a *very brief* (1-2 sentences) explanation of why you think that answer is best.

Topic: Hurricane Katrina

Subtopic: Government response and public reaction

Research Question: Why was the public unhappy with the government's response to Katrina?

- I. Introduce the overall topic, explain basic info about that topic
 - a. Who: People of the south surrounding N.O.
 - b. What: Big hurricane that devastated the land.
 - c. Where: Southeastern United States (i.e. Louisiana, South Florida, Mississippi).
 - d. When: End of August 2005.
 - e. Why: High Pressure, Low Pressure, Warm temperature, and combos. Natural Disaster, global warming, linked to climate change.
- II. Introduce the subtopic that you intend to focus on, explain basic info about that topic
 - a. Before Katrina and aftermath and the Government's relief efforts.
 - i. What did the government do to prevent or fix the situation?
 - b. General opinion about the government.
 - c. How did the public feel/how did the government live up to their expectations.
- III. Questions within the subtopic that are still unanswered or being debated—in-depth, analytical questions, not simple questions of fact
 - a. Why hasn't New Orleans been rebuilt after all this time?
 - b. Was the disorganization of the government intentional?
 - c. Did the media blow it out of proportion in order to blame someone?

- d. Were the failed levees due to negligence of the Army Corps of Engineers?
 - e. Did the government really do the best that they could have done?
- IV. Your research question (one of the questions listed in III) and your proposed answer (your hypothesis)
- a. Did the media blow it out of proportion? Hypothesis: Yes and no.
 - b. Yes: Biased media made the situation look life threatening even after immediate danger had passed.
 - i. Footage of people on rooftops, etc. for weeks afterwards.
 - ii. Kanye West
 - c. No: Lack of Action from Government
 - i. Lack of manpower
 - ii. Delayed response
 - iii. Government was reactive instead of proactive
 - iv. People weren't taking very kindly to George Bush at this point, so no one was really inspired to take action with him.
- V. Research plan—the information you will need, the things you'll have to find out, to answer your research question/prove your hypothesis.
- a. How did the government respond?
 - i. Pre-Katrina response
 - 1. Preventative planning regarding levy vs. hurricanes
 - 2. How did the government respond after hurricane warning and before it hit.
 - ii. Post-Katrina response
 - 1. Rescue efforts
 - 2. Cleanup efforts
 - 3. Housing/food/amenities
 - b. What type of recovery happened in New Orleans (non government)
 - c. Media's initial response
 - d. How did the people really feel?
 - i. Difference in reaction between different social classes
 - ii. People directly effected
 - iii. Other people around the world
 - iv. Research from major media, surveys, people publically speaking out against the government's failure to act appropriately,

Topic: Scarcity of water and food

Subtopic: Scarcity of water and food in Africa

Research Question: How does the interrelationship between water and food production affect life in sub-Saharan Africa?

- I. Introduce the overall topic, explain basic info about that topic

- a. What questions must this paper answer about this topic?
 - Why is it scarce?
 - Why is scarcity an issue?
 - Is the scarcity of food dependent on the scarcity of water?
 - When did water start becoming scarce?
 - What can the U.S do about it? Is it affecting the U.S. Is it directly affecting Americans? Or are we part of the problem? (These 2 questions are less important than the others for an overview of the topic, but do help the reader connect to the topic.)
- II. Introduce the subtopic that you intend to focus on, explain basic info about that topic
 - a. What questions must this paper answer about this subtopic?
 - Where do they get water? Is it filtered/contaminated?
 - Does location of “watering holes” play a factor in scarcity of water?
 - Does Africa possess the technological means to purify water?
 - What is Africa’s annual GDP?
 - What part of Africa is the worst?
 - What areas have the most malnutrition? Rates of malnutrition (age, sex, location, etc)?
 - How do we know there is scarcity?
 - Which country has been most reliable in relief?
 - How long has the scarcity been going on?
 - How are relief efforts received?
 - Average age of death or causes of death
 - Diet
 - Social Economics (poverty level?)
- III. Questions within the subtopic that are still unanswered or being debated—in-depth, analytical questions, not simple questions of fact
 - What are the effects of this? Population effects? Demographic effects?
 - How is this scarcity affecting environment?
 - How is government having an effect and can they change it?
 - What are the health effects?
 - How is this affecting the economy?
 - How does this scarcity affect social and cultural environments?
 - Does Africa have the means to prevent these issues or is intervention by other countries necessary?
 - How big of a role does religion play in this issue?
- IV. Your research question (one of the questions listed in III) and your proposed answer (your hypothesis)
 - How does the interrelationship between water and food production affect life in sub-Saharan Africa?
 - The lack of water affects food production.

- Conflicts come up because of the lack of food and water
 - Culture is affected. Both affecting each other?
- V. Research plan—the information you will need, the things you’ll have to find out, to answer your research question/prove your hypothesis.
- [Most of the questions under III would apply here, because they feed into the answer to the research question.]

Topic: Subprime lending

Subtopic: Subprime mortgage crisis

Research Question: Could the subprime mortgage crisis have been prevented?

- I. Introduce the overall topic, explain basic info about that topic
 - Explain what subprime lending is, and a short background history of subprime lending practices (details, examples). Explain why a lender would issue a subprime loan – explain both risks and benefits to the institution itself, the borrower, and the economy. *If you begin with the benefits and then explain the risks, it would be a good set-up for a transition into part II.*
- II. Introduce the subtopic that you intend to focus on, explain basic info about that topic
 - a. What questions must this paper answer about this subtopic?
 - What is the subprime mortgage crisis?
 - When it started
 - How it started
 - Who it affects
 - Where it is a problem
 - Who dunnit
 - Has anyone been held accountable for the subprime mortgage crisis?
- III. Questions within the subtopic that are still unanswered or being debated—in-depth, analytical questions, not simple questions of fact
 - Could the subprime mortgage have been prevented?
 - Why did the subprime mortgage crisis happen?
 - Can this happen again?
 - Is the risk worth it to lend to people with poor credit?
- IV. Your research question (one of the questions listed in III) and your proposed answer (your hypothesis)

Yes:

- Had the government been more responsible regarding the regulation of these banks and responsible individuals.
- Had the banks been more responsible, i.e. reserved, in their lending. That is, not lending to high-risk borrowers.

No:

- Although the subprime mortgage crisis may have been preventable, the economic bursting of the bubble we've been in since 1970 was inevitable. Therefore, even if this crisis was averted, we most likely would have entered a recession through other means.
 - By the time it was realized to be a problem, it was too late to stop. As an analogy, consider a train moving very fast. When the conductor realizes an imminent crash, the momentum is, at that moment, too great to stop.
- V. Research plan—the information you will need, the things you'll have to find out, to answer your research question/prove your hypothesis.
- We will need information about what the requirements of the loan were and consequences for not following the pay back requirements. Expert Information from loan officers and mortgage specialists. Federal Bureau of Investigation evidence showing the mortgage fraud investigations. Information on why the banks gave out so many of these loans if it wasn't a safe investment. Was there any effort put forth to prevent this crisis from happening? By who? What are the government rules for subprime lending? Were they followed? If it failed why did they allow it to fail without stepping in and helping?

Style/Voice

The question was asked how your paper should present the information in each of these sections. This example shows how you might introduce each section (using the subprime mortgage topic as an example), after which you would go on to provide all the information required in that section.

- I. Subprime lending has been a feature of the banking industry for many years. ...
- II. The subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 arose because...
- III. A number of questions about this crisis remain unanswered. Experts are still debating the reasons for it, ...
- IV. In my research I will attempt to answer the question of whether the crisis could have been prevented. ...
- V. In order to prove or disprove my hypothesis, I will need to investigate the regulations regarding mortgages...