

ADVANCED THINKING IN RESEARCH

Michael Clay Thompson

1. CREATION OF IDEAS

A. Production of an elaborate new and original critical or interpretive idea, theory, or model. A highly elaborated original idea regarding the subject researched, with possible brief presentation of preexisting ideas as a framework for presentation of the new idea. An elaborate, detailed case made for the validity of the original idea, based on factual, logical, and or expert evidence also discovered in research. Example: The undiscovered theme in the plays of Bernard Shaw.

B. Comparison of researched ideas with self-created interpretation of ideas. An elaborate comparison of competing researched ideas, supporting neither, resolving in favor of a more valid original critical or interpretive idea, theory, or model, with a case made for the validity of the original idea. Example: The inadequacy of three theoretical models of social mobility, with a new model suggested.

2. EVALUATION OF IDEAS

A. Evaluation of compared competing ideas. Close comparison of two or more competing ideas discovered in research, with a case made supporting some, one, or none of the ideas, on the basis of factual, logical, and or expert evidence also discovered in research. Example: Why the particle theory of gravity is a better model than the wave theory of gravity.

B. Evaluation of an idea discovered in research. Close examination of an idea discovered in research, with a case made for or against the idea, on the basis of factual, logical, and or expert evidence also discovered in research. Example: A refutation of J.M. Whistler's attacks on the originality of Oscar Wilde's theories of art.

3. REPORTING OF IDEAS

A. Comparison of competing ideas. Close comparison or contrast of two or more competing ideas discovered in research, analyzing and enumerating the differences between the ideas. Example: The contrast between Voltaire's Enlightenment-based philosophy and the optimism of Leibnitz, whom Voltaire ridiculed.

B. Thesis report of a researched idea. A presentation of a critical or scholarly idea, with no attempt to evaluate the validity of the idea, to compare it with other competing theories, or to challenge the idea with evidence or ideas of one's own. Example: Randall Jarrell's interpretation of the poetry of Robert Frost.

4. REPORTING OF FACTS (NOT ALLOWED)

Though there is a scholarly place for high-quality factual reports, I do not allow students to do them as research papers in my class. I feel that students need to learn to discuss ideas, and that the research paper is a good opportunity for them to practice articulating literary and intellectual ideas.

A. Theme biographical fact report.

A report of factual information clearly and intelligently organized around a central theme. No production of original ideas. This variety is not acceptable in a research paper for my class, since I wish you to focus your discussion on ideas, rather than facts. Example: Charles Dickens's relationship with his family.

B. Encyclopedia-style themeless chronological biographical fact report.

Inappropriate for advanced scholarship. Example: The life of Charles Dickens, from birth to death.