

ARC 5205 Advanced Design Theory

Critical Theory in Architecture

Fall 2011

GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH

Good research begins with curiosity: about the subject, the world in which the subject exists, what others know about the subject, and the tools that are used to reveal the subject to you. That said, all research projects have the same basic parts:

1. define the subject – identify the problem
2. gather basic information from primary and secondary sources
3. re-define the subject – state a hypothesis
4. gather additional information as needed to test the hypothesis
5. organize and analyze your material
6. state your conclusions, usually in a similar order to the process of discovery
7. repeat as needed

The six essential steps can also be abbreviated to: identify the problem, hypothesize and experiment.

For in-class presentations, the emphasis is on the first, second and third steps. For your term paper, the procedure in full is expected. In research, the assumption should always be that at any given point in the process you are able to share your materials without having drawn conclusions. Conclusions are not always conclusive, that is to say, they can synthesize the material without giving you a clear answer to your hypothesis. The success of your research will depend in large part on the clarity of your question (step 1 and 3), the thoroughness of your research and consistency of your method of analysis.

For good research, you need to use both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are documents, images, and objects produced in direct relation to the context or event of your subject. This includes: accounts of the event created at the time, or soon after the time, of the event by firsthand observers or participants. For example, lab results, original documents, letters, newspapers of the time, drawings, photos and maps relevant to the context and so forth.

Secondary sources are texts and images produced as part of the analysis of a given event, object or idea. Secondary sources include: encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), books by historians or others that interpret or review research, biography. For your short research project, I recommend using at least one primary resource and three to four secondary sources. For your term paper project, additional sources of both types will be necessary for you to generate enough material to write coherently about the subject.

When reading a source it is always useful to ask these three questions:

1. What is the argument of the author? (Argument)
2. What is the context of this book? (Historiography)
3. What sources is the author using? (Sources)

This will help you understand the relevance of any given reading to the hypothesis you have formulated about your subject. In the case of statistics and scientific data, you will also have to determine the relative authenticity and authority of the material. For example, are these traffic statistics determined by the city planning authority or a private institution with a monetary stake in the outcome? Does the experimental method conform to

accepted guidelines for this subject? I doubt that you will face these difficulties over the course of your research this semester; most of our materials will be based in the humanities and social sciences, but it is good to see that all research, regardless of the field, uses the same template.