Essential and Foundation Question Notes

* The results of your research should be more than just a regurgitation of the facts or a summary of other people’s ideas.
* They should be based on new ideas, explanations, analysis, and evaluation.
* The first step to writing a thoughtful and original research paper is to pose an essential question.
* An essential question is an open-ended question that points to the heart of your topic, especially its controversies.
* Your paper will attempt to answer your essential question.
* Essential questions generate multiple plausible answers, perspectives, and research directions that lead to other questions.
* Essential questions cast old knowledge, ideas, and texts in a new light.
* They lead to discovery and uncoverage, as opposed to coverage. This means that you don’t need to know all the information on a particular topic, but know essential information well.
* Less is more. Less is better.
* Go in depth in your study instead of trying to cover a topic that is too broad.
* Essential questions develop further and deepen interest in a subject. They are provocative, enticing, and engagingly framed.
* They are always matters of analysis, synthesis, and evaluative judgment. You must “go beyond” the information given.
* Answers to essential questions cannot be found. They must be invented.
* Examples of essential questions:
  + What would life in America be like today if the two World Wars had not been fought?
  + How might our lives be different if the popular vote selected the President?
  + How do we learn about American life through fiction?
  + Who is an American?
  + How have attitudes of the American people been influenced by cinema over time?
  + Is US history a history of progress?
* These are interesting, open-ended questions that can be answered in a variety of ways.
* After asking an essential question, you should brainstorm foundation questions.
* Foundation questions tend to be more topic and subject specific. They provide topic and subject specific doorways to essential questions.
* Examples of foundation questions:
  + Is the gap between rich and poor any better now than it was 100 years ago?
  + Do new technologies always lead to progress?
  + What is progress?
  + Which events in our history could be defined as progress and which ones were not?
  + Do events that result in shame or repression still lead to progress?
* These questions are answered through research.
* Answers to foundation questions will be used to answer your essential question.
* The more foundation questions you have the better. You may decide to add or subtract foundation questions as you research your topic.
* The answer to your foundation questions will provide factual information that is needed to answer your essential question.
* Consider writing foundation questions that come from all four categories of the higher-level thought spectrum. The four categories are memory, convergent thinking, divergent thinking, and evaluative thinking. Asking questions will increase your comprehension of the subject matter.
* Make sure to ask relevant questions that will give you the information you need.
* Memory level questions are those to which you will likely find answers in sources such as books, websites, and other reference materials.
* Asking this type of question provides background for the subject. These questions bring forth simple reproduction of facts, formulae, or other items of remembered content. Thought processes involved while asking and answering these questions are naming, defining, identifying, designating, or giving yes/no responses.
* Memory questions usually begin with who, what, where, and when.
* Examples of memory questions:
  + Who developed the planetary model of the atom?
  + What did Vincent van Gogh do after he stopped working at his family’s art gallery?
  + Where was the First Constitutional Convention held?
  + When did Richard III reign?
* Convergent thinking questions are those which represent the analysis and integration of given or remembered information. They lead you to an expected end result or answer. Thought processes involved while asking and answering these questions are explaining, stating relationships, and comparing and contrasting.
* Convergent thinking questions usually begin with why, how, and in what ways.
* Examples of convergent thinking questions:
  + Why was Richard III considered an evil king?
  + How does gravity differ from electrostatic attraction?
  + In what ways does Roman drama compare to the heroic epics of Indian literature?
* Divergent thinking questions are those which represent intellectual operations wherein you are free to generate independently your own ideas or to take a new direction or perspective on a given topic. Thought processes involved while asking and answering these questions are predicting, hypothesizing, inferring, or reconstructing.
* Divergent thinking questions usually begin with these words or phrases imagine, suppose, predict, if…, then, how might, can you create, and what are some possible consequences.
* Examples of divergent thinking questions:
  + Can you imagine ways that professional soccer has changed American sports culture?
  + Suppose that Caesar never returned to Rome from Gaul. Would the Empire have existed?
  + What predictions can you make regarding the voting process in Ohio?
  + How might life in the year 2100 differ from today?
  + If computers correct spelling, then is it necessary for third graders to take spelling tests?
* Evaluative thinking questions are those which deal with matters of judgments, value, and choice. They are characterized by their judgmental quality. Thought processes involved while asking and answering these questions are valuing, judging, defending, or justifying choices.
* Evaluative thinking questions usually begin with these words or phrases defend, judge, justify, what do you think about…, and what is your opinion about…
* Examples of evaluative thinking questions:
  + What do you think are the advantages of solar power over coal-fired electric plants?
  + How do you feel about raising the driving age to 18? Why?
  + Justify President Bush’s decision to invade Iraq.
  + Why would you vote for\_\_\_\_?
  + What do you think of capital punishment for drug dealers?
  + What is your opinion on using animals for medical research?
* In order for your research paper to be more than a game of Trivial Pursuit you must critically and creatively process the information you find.
* By turning your topic into an essential question and asking good foundation questions, you are ensuring that your results show evidence of original and inventive ideas based upon logical conclusions and thorough research.