

# AP RESEARCH

## Summer Assignment Background Information

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### Overview

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Welcome to AP Research! This summer is about building the skills and vocabulary that make academic inquiry possible. Understanding the landscape of scholarly work comes first: how researchers identify problems, frame questions, and build on what others have already found. To get you started, this assignment introduces five key terms, puts real academic papers in your hands, and asks you to start thinking the way researchers do.

### Part 1: Key Terms

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*Study the following terms carefully. You will use these throughout the course, and you will need to identify them in an academic paper in Part 2.*

**Research Question:** A focused, arguable, and researchable question that defines the specific problem or phenomenon a scholar intends to investigate. A strong research question is neither too broad nor too narrow, and it cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.

*Example: How does chronic sleep deprivation affect executive functioning in adolescents aged 13–17?*

**Peer-Reviewed Source:** A scholarly article, study, or book chapter that has been evaluated by a panel of independent experts in the same field before publication. Peer review is the standard for credibility in academic research. These sources are typically found in academic journals and databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, or PubMed.

*Example: An article published in the Journal of Educational Psychology that underwent blind review by three external researchers before acceptance.*

**Gap (in the Literature):** An area, question, or population that existing research has not yet fully explored or addressed. Identifying a gap is how researchers justify the need for a new study. Gaps can be methodological (no one used this approach), topical (this subject hasn't been studied), or population-based (this group has been overlooked).

*Example: While many studies examine stress in college students, few have looked specifically at stress response among first-generation college students at rural institutions. That gap in the research is exactly what a new study could address.*

**Methodology:** The specific set of methods, procedures, and tools a researcher uses to collect and analyze data. Methodology explains not just what a researcher did, but why those choices were the right fit for the question being asked. A strong methodology is also

replicable, meaning another researcher could follow the same steps and reasonably expect to get comparable results. Two studies on the same topic can reach very different conclusions depending on the methodology each one employed.

*Example: A researcher studying student anxiety might use surveys to gather data from a large group, while another might conduct in-depth interviews with a smaller set of participants. Both are valid methodologies, but each is suited to a different kind of research question.*

**Analysis:** The systematic process of examining data, evidence, or sources in order to identify patterns, draw conclusions, and answer a research question. In AP Research, analysis goes beyond simply summarizing what others have said. The real work lies in interpreting, comparing, and evaluating evidence to build a supported argument or reach a finding. In quantitative research, this often involves inferential statistics, tools like t-tests or p-values that help researchers determine whether their results are statistically significant or likely due to chance.

*Example: Rather than stating 'three studies found that exercise reduces anxiety,' analysis would compare the methodologies and populations of those studies to evaluate the strength and transferability of that claim.*

## Part 2: Exploring Sample Academic Papers

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Click on the link on the Signature website to browse a selection of sample AP Research papers. Read through at least three before choosing one that genuinely interests you. Your chosen paper's topic will guide your work in Part 3, so pick something you are curious about.

## Part 3: Developing Research Questions

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Now that you have chosen a paper to examine carefully, it's time to think like a researcher. Respond to the questions provided below and then create five original research questions that reflect your own interests and curiosities. Bring your assignment to class on the first day of school.

## Questions? Contact Us Before the End of the School Year

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If you have general questions about subject areas or need guidance in choosing a paper, please reach out to the appropriate teacher below before the end of the school year.

**Science:** Dr. Hang, Mrs. Hayden

**Arts and Humanities:** Mr. Ethridge, Dr. Halvorsen, Ms. Grant

# AP Research

## Summer Assignment

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*Answer four questions about the paper you chose to focus on and then devise five research questions of your own. (Answer on a separate sheet of paper.)*

### Question 1: Research Question & Gap Identification

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***Identify the research question in your selected paper.***

State it in your own words and explain what makes it a strong research question. Identify where the author addresses a gap in the existing research.

### Question 2: The Research Gap

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***Describe the gap in your own words.***

Explain how that gap justifies the need for the paper you read.

### Question 3: Methodology

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***Describe the methodology used in your selected paper.***

What methods did the researcher use to collect or analyze data, and why were those methods a good fit for the RQ being investigated?

### Question 4: Evidence Analysis

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***Find a place in the paper where the researcher analyzes evidence rather than simply summarizing it.***

Describe how they interpret, compare, or evaluate the data, and explain how that supports the paper's argument.

### Question 5: Original Research Questions

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***Provide five original research questions that you might consider using in AP Research this year.***

