

Brainstorming EE Topics

Take out a blank piece of paper. Turn the paper sideways. Create four columns. Write down the names of four courses you've taken in high school across the top of the columns and underline them (Biology, IB English, Theater, Orchestra, Geometry, etc.). Below each course, jot-down anything that comes to mind in response to the prompts below. Think through the prompts course-by-course, remembering the lessons, issues, projects, discussions, Socratic seminars, and readings that you encountered. List those that:

- Intrigued you
- Made you consider a career in the field
- Made you talk nonstop
- Morally outraged you
- Broke your heart
- Disturbed you
- Made you feel exceptionally smart/ignorant
- Opened a whole new world to you
- Left you unsatisfied—there was so much more to discover
- Puzzled you—something just didn't make sense to you

Fill the paper. When you've exhausted your memory, start crossing-off ideas that are outside the approved topics, less interesting, less promising, impractical, unoriginal, unimportant, or redundant. Circle your favorites.

Take a separate sheet of paper and make three columns this time. Across the top, write down and underline a favorite topic from three different subjects. In each column, do the following:

- Verify the specificity of the topic. You may need to narrow it further.
 - If I started with, "King Leopold's claim to the Congo," I might narrow it to, "The most significant effect King Leopold II and General Sanford's campaign had on American trade with the Congo."
- Compose two or three probing questions for each topic.
 - What drove Sanford to betray King Leopold at the Anti-Slavery Conference?
 - By examining the early Belgian Congolese trade, what can we learn about contemporary American trade agreements with nations that institutionalize inhumanity against their citizens?
 - What role does publicity/propaganda play in American citizens' acceptance of trade with other nations?
- Consider the list of questions and compose one unified research question that incorporates the topic.
 - What are the most important principles underlying America's post-Emancipation Proclamation response to the Belgian Congolese publicity campaign?

Now you have three promising EE ideas in three different fields. This need not be, and likely won't be, your final research question, but you are now thinking in the right frame of mind. Congratulations!