

Critical Inquiry: Deepening Your Consciousness

A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men [and women] feel themselves to be in control. If people as historical beings necessarily engaged with other people in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement, it would be (and is) a violation of their humanity. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging the process of inquiry is one of violence. [...] The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation and individualism.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 66

To Begin Inquiry

Consider what you *wonder* about: What is important to you? What issue in your field do you care about? What event, situation, or problem you are *interested* in or *curious* about and want to understand? Why?

Frame your wondering as an open question, “Why?” or “How?” What do you want to try to understand? This will be a first draft of your research question.

From Initial Question to Project Proposal

What do you want to know? Why? And how will you find out?

Step 1

Describe what you already know. Be specific. Provide a snapshot of the issue, situation, or problem: Show how your interest in this issue developed and why you care. (Identify as precisely as you can what you value, your topic.) This can be developed into your **Introduction**.

Step 2

Explain how your personal issues relate to the larger, societal “occasion” for your search. What do you hope/expect to discover? What other perspectives are involved? Who else might care about this issue? Scan databases, book catalogues, dissertations, reference lists to see what has been written in relation to your research question. What books and articles will help you answer your question? Write about each: How does each help, or not? What are they not helping you understand? If necessary, refocus your research question, make it more specific. This will become your **Literature Review**.

Step 3

Describe how you plan to go about trying to answer your research question: Where do you go to discover other *perspectives* and necessary information? Will you need to interview experts, or survey a segment of the population? (NOTE: As you review the literature, keep in mind methodologies other researchers have used.) This will become a description of your **Methodology**.