

Research Guide and Topics

1. Literature + Real-World Connections (High Engagement)

Students research real topics connected to texts they read.

- **A novel's real-world issue**
 - Example: *The Outsiders* → Juvenile justice, class conflict, teen gangs in the 1960s vs. today
 - Research Question: *How realistic is the novel's portrayal of this issue?*
 - **Historical background of a novel**
 - Example: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* → Jim Crow laws, segregation, sharecropping
 - Product: Mini research report + “How this history shapes the characters”
 - **Banned books investigations**
 - Research why a book was challenged, who challenged it, and what that says about society
 - Includes argument writing: *Should this book be taught in schools?*
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2. Pop Culture & Media Research (Very High Buy-In)

Academic skills, but students don't feel like it's “school.”

- **How social media influences teens**
 - Topics: algorithms, body image, misinformation, online activism
 - Product: Research article + infographic
 - **Music as protest**
 - Research how songs respond to social issues (civil rights, war, injustice)
 - Compare historical protest songs to modern ones
 - **Film vs. book accuracy**
 - Research how a movie adaptation changed the original story and why
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3. Mystery, True Crime & Survival (Extremely Engaging)

- **Famous unsolved mysteries**
 - DB Cooper, Roanoke Colony, Zodiac Cipher
 - Students evaluate competing theories using evidence
- **Survival stories**
 - Shackleton, Andes plane crash, Titanic
 - Research what helped people survive and connect to theme/resilience

- **Historical disasters**
 - Great Chicago Fire, Triangle Shirtwaist Fire
 - Focus on cause, impact, and reform
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4. Identity, Voice, and Social Issues (Powerful & Age-Appropriate)

- **Coming-of-age across cultures**
 - Research rites of passage in different societies
 - **Civil rights figures beyond the textbook**
 - Youth activists, lesser-known leaders, writers
 - **Language & identity**
 - Dialects, code-switching, slang, texting language
 - Research how language shapes identity
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5. Author & Storytelling Research

- **Author's life and influence**
 - How did the author's experiences shape their writing?
 - **Mythology & modern storytelling**
 - Research a myth and trace its influence on books, movies, or games
 - **Folktales across cultures**
 - Same story type (Cinderella, trickster tales) in different cultures
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6. “Research Without a Traditional Paper” Options

These reduce AI misuse and increase originality:

- **Podcast script**
 - **Museum exhibit display**
 - **Magazine feature article**
 - **News report**
 - **Annotated slideshow**
 - **Creative nonfiction piece using research**
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7. Inquiry-Based Research Starters (Student-Driven)

Give students **question stems** instead of topics:

- *Why do societies ban certain books?*
 - *How does fear influence group behavior?*
 - *What makes a hero across cultures?*
 - *How do stories preserve history?*
 - *When does loyalty become dangerous?*
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8. Research Skills You Can Explicitly Teach

- Evaluating sources (real vs. fake)
 - Paraphrasing vs. copying
 - Integrating quotations smoothly
 - Writing research questions
 - Creating Works Cited pages
 - Avoiding plagiarism (human writing!)
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ELA Research Guide

A Step-by-Step Guide for Any Topic

Part I: What Is Research in ELA?

In English Language Arts, research is not just collecting facts. It is about **reading closely, asking good questions, evaluating sources, and explaining ideas clearly** using evidence.

You are expected to:

- Ask thoughtful questions
 - Read multiple sources
 - Use evidence correctly
 - Explain ideas in your own words
 - Make connections to literature, society, or human experience
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Part II: Choosing a Strong Research Topic

Step 1: Select a Broad Topic

Your topic may come from:

- A novel or short story
- History or current events
- Media, music, or film
- Identity, culture, or language
- Mystery, survival, or social issues

Examples:

- Banned books
 - Civil rights movements
 - Survival stories
 - Social media and teens
 - Mythology in modern stories
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Step 2: Narrow Your Focus

A strong research topic is **specific**, not too broad.

Too broad:

- Civil Rights
Better:
- Youth activists during the Civil Rights Movement

Too broad:

- Social media
Better:
 - How social media algorithms influence teen opinions
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Part III: Writing a Research Question

Your research should be guided by **one clear question**.

Good Research Questions:

- Cannot be answered with yes or no

- Require evidence
- Invite explanation and analysis

Question starters:

- How does...
- Why does...
- In what ways...
- What impact did...
- How is ___ portrayed in...

Examples:

- How does *The Outsiders* reflect class conflict in America?
 - Why are certain books challenged or banned?
 - How do myths influence modern storytelling?
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Part IV: Finding Reliable Sources

Required Sources

You should use **at least 3–5 credible sources**, such as:

- Books or textbooks
- News articles
- Educational websites (.edu, .gov, museums)
- Interviews or documentaries

Avoid:

- Random blogs
 - Opinion-only websites
 - Wikipedia (you may use it to find sources, not as a source)
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Evaluating a Source (CRAAP Method – Simplified)

Ask:

- **Currency:** Is it recent or still relevant?
- **Relevance:** Does it help answer my question?
- **Authority:** Who wrote it?

- **Accuracy:** Is it supported by evidence?
 - **Purpose:** Is it informing, persuading, or entertaining?
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Part V: Taking Notes the Right Way

Rule #1: Never Copy and Paste

Write notes in **your own words**.

Three Types of Notes

1. **Paraphrase**
Rewrite the idea using your own language.
 2. **Direct Quote**
Use quotation marks and record the author.
 3. **Summary**
Briefly explain the main idea of a source.
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Note-Taking Organizer (Model)

Source Title:

Author:

Main Idea:

Key Evidence:

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My Thoughts / Questions:

Part VI: Avoiding Plagiarism (Very Important)

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas without credit.

To avoid it:

- Always cite sources
- Use quotation marks for exact words

- Paraphrase instead of copying
- Add your own explanation after evidence

If you didn't think it, you must cite it.

Part VII: Organizing Your Research

Common Structures

Informational

- Introduction
- Background
- Key facts
- Conclusion

Analytical

- Claim
- Evidence
- Explanation
- Connection

Argument

- Claim
 - Evidence
 - Counterargument
 - Conclusion
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Sample Outline

- I. Introduction
 - II. Background Information
 - III. Key Evidence & Examples
 - IV. Analysis / Explanation
 - V. Conclusion
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Part VIII: Using Evidence Correctly

Every piece of evidence must be:

1. Introduced
2. Quoted or paraphrased
3. Explained

Example:

According to historian _____, “_____.”

This shows that...

This matters because...

Never drop a quote without explanation.

Part IX: Creating a Works Cited Page

Basic MLA format includes:

- Author
- Title
- Website or Publisher
- Date
- URL

Example:

Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Article*. Website Name, date, URL.

Part X: Final Product Options

Your research may be presented as:

- Research paper
- Feature article
- Podcast script
- Museum exhibit
- Documentary storyboard
- Slideshow with speaker notes
- Creative nonfiction piece using research

All formats must include:

- Evidence

- Analysis
 - Works Cited
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Part XI: Reflection (Required)

Answer in complete sentences:

- What did I learn?
 - What surprised me?
 - What was challenging?
 - How did my thinking change?
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Part XII: Research Checklist

Before turning in:

- Clear research question
 - At least 3 credible sources
 - Evidence included and explained
 - Proper citations
 - Original writing
 - Works Cited page
 - Reflection completed
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Common Core Alignment

- RI.8.1 – Cite textual evidence
 - RI.8.7 – Evaluate sources
 - W.8.7 – Conduct research
 - W.8.8 – Use evidence properly
 - W.8.9 – Draw evidence from texts
 - SL.8.4 – Present information clearly
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Teacher Extensions (Optional)

- Group research roles (Researcher, Writer, Fact Checker, Editor)

- Checkpoints for drafts and notes
- Conferencing days
- Peer review protocols
- Source credibility mini-lessons