**Developing Your Big Idea: Use the Abstract to Help You Develop Your Project**

* First, determine your Big Idea – something that you know is important to everyone and that you want to investigate further.

* Once you have determined your Big Idea that you want to investigate, you will naturally ask questions about it. The questions you ask will determine the depth of your investigation. We call these questions Essential Questions. You should list your essential questions on your abstract.  We also recommend that you post them on your display board.

* Essential Questions lead you to ask even more questions. They ask the very most important things that you need to know.

**Following is an example of how to use the headings of your abstract to develop your project:**

**Big Idea:**

Rights and Responsibilities of Student Citizens in America

**Essential Questions:**

* How do United States Citizens know their rights and responsibilities?

* How are the rights and responsibilities of children different from those of adult citizens?

* How does the Constitution contribute to the determination of the rights and responsibilities of all American Citizens?

* Are there other factors in addition to the Constitution that determine our rights and responsibilities as children and as adult citizens of the United States?

* How do we determine if student citizens have different rights and responsibilities from adult citizens?

* Why does being a student impact your rights and responsibilities?

Now that you have decided on the Big Idea that you want to investigate and you have asked the essential questions that will help you come to a conclusion, you will need to conduct some research to find your answers.

**Research and Investigate**

There are many places to search for information regarding the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the United States. You may choose to read about the Constitution or you may choose to read the Constitution itself for starters. Specific amendments and bills may be of particular interest to you. You can certainly find much information on the Internet, for example the primary documents at the [Library of Congress](http://www.loc.gov/index.html), the detailed information at the [National Constitution Center](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/), the [Center for Civic Education](http://www.civiced.org/), or [Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids](http://bensguide.gpo.gov/). These are just suggestions to help you see how easy it will be to locate the information you need to answer your essential questions and investigate your Big Idea.

**Validating Your Sources**

What does it mean to validate your sources?

To show the validity of something means that you must prove its truthfulness and accuracy. This means that you will want to do some background research on you sources.

**Examples:**

* If you are using an Internet source and the site is a .com site and that usually means that it is a commercial site. In that case, you must investigate to see if the company has a solid reputation for stating correct information only.

* If in doubt, do not use the information.  If an Internet site is a .gov site, then you can validate the information by reading to see what government agency posted the information, if it is federal, state, or local, and who is responsible for the information.

* If it is an .edu site, then check to see what educational institution has posted the information and find out if it is a credible educational institution.

* If in doubt, ask your parents or your teachers if you should rely on the information on the Internet site, the books, magazines, or newspaper articles you may have chosen.

* If you are conducting an interview via email, telephone, or in person, find out the background of the person with whom you are speaking to be certain that they are relaying the most correct information that you can locate regarding your topic. Verify that the person or persons are the most credible sources for your information.

**Writing a Brief Summary**

Before you can summarize your findings, you must first analyze all of the facts. Take everything apart and look for the details, the connections, the patterns, and the cause and effect issues, make comparisons and evaluate what you have discovered. Then, pull it altogether in a summary that explains briefly – in just a few words – what your project is all about.

**State Your Conclusion**

From your research, what can you conclude about your Big Idea?  Look at the answers you have found for your Essential Questions and write down what you now know about your Big Idea.

**Find a Better Solution, Change the Outcome or Make a Prediction**

Can you create a better solution to the problem? How could you change the outcome? What is your prediction for the future of this Big Idea you have been researching? You will probably not have an answer for all three of these questions, depending on the Big Idea you are investigating, but you must answer at least one of these questions or your abstract will be considered incomplete by the judges.

**Bibliography**

You must write out your resources in the form of a bibliography. You will see that one example of a resource to help you write a bibliography correctly has been provided to you at the top of the bibliography page. You should use this free Internet site to be certain that you are using the correct format. An incorrect format could cost you points on the judges’ score card.

**Creating Your Display**

Now that your research and writing are finished, you will be concentrating your efforts to create a presentation which will communicate your findings and your own ideas to the judges. You will need to refer to the Rules and Regulations for the West Virginia State Social Studies Fair link to find out about the different possibilities for presentation. This year for the first time students are invited to use hand-held battery powered technology equipment to enhance their presentations.

Good Luck with your research. We hope to see you at the Fair!