Research Planner

Complete this before you begin researching — to keep the research oriented towards the writing rather than away from it.

1 — BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Answer these before opening a single source.

What is this piece about — in plain language?

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What do I already think about this subject?

Your initial position — even if it changes. Research without a starting position tends to accumulate without direction.

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2 — WHAT THE RESEARCH NEEDS TO DO

Identify which of these applies before you begin. Each has a different endpoint.

- ■ **Establish the ground — verify facts, check claims, confirm what is true.**

Done when the facts are established.

- ■ **Find the argument — locate the position the material supports.**

Done when the central claim becomes clear.

- ■ **Find the example — identify specific cases, figures, or quotations.**

Done when the examples are sufficient to carry the argument.

3 — DURING RESEARCH

Keep these questions in view as you work.

What is the argument so far?

If you cannot answer this, the research may be accumulating without direction.

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What do I still need — specifically?

Name it precisely. Vague need produces indefinite research.

What have I found that changes what I thought?

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4 — READY TO STOP?

Research is done when all three of these are true — not when you feel fully prepared.

- ■ The ground is established — the facts the piece relies on are confirmed.
- ■ The argument is visible — I can state the central claim in one sentence.
- ■ The examples are sufficient — I have enough to carry the argument.

If continuing to research feels like progress but the argument is not clearer — stop. Return to the notes. The piece needs thinking, not more material.
