



Ms. Pronko & Mr. Goraczko

2026-2027

Congratulations on signing up for AP Research, a fun, rewarding course that will stretch you in ways no other class has!

As you plan ahead, know that capital-R Research takes significant time and headspace. It requires planning, time management, and follow-through. Make sure the rest of your schedule allows for the time and energy needed to be successful in the class. A study hall in your schedule is HIGHLY recommended to allow you the flexibility to meet with mentors and conduct your research. Students without one—or students who overextend themselves with too many APs—often struggle to keep up with the many due dates and deadlines.

AP Research is most rewarding when students a) know what they're getting themselves into and b) select a topic they love. After all, you'll spend a whole year on this process, delving into this topic, reading about it ad nauseum. (Eventually you will need to read and report on ~20 scholarly sources pertaining to your topic!) To facilitate that long-term commitment you'll eventually make, you will benefit from orienting yourself to the structure of the course and doing some thinking over the summer to help you settle on a potential topic and research question.

A Few Important Notes Before You Begin

Before diving into the summer work, there are a few big-picture ideas that are important to understand about AP Research and the summer assignments below.

1. The purpose of the summer work is to orient you to the course and help prime you for the type of work required of you in this course.

The purpose of this summer work is not to arrive in late August with a flawless research question or a fully formed project—we will work our way towards that goal over the year. Instead, we hope this summer work will encourage you to begin developing habits of curiosity, reflection, and intellectual exploration.

2. The summer work is meant to orient you—not intimidate you.

We intentionally begin by asking you to read sample papers as part of the summer preparatory work because reading sample papers (and watching presentations) should help orient you to the types of topics others have explored and the scope of projects that have been successful. It will also help you gather your own sources.

3. The compost heap is the most important part of the summer work (see Assignment 4 below for more details on this assignment)

While the “Compost Heap” is ultimately the most important part of the summer work, we encourage you to read sample papers and watch sample presentations first, because those assignments will familiarize you with the kinds of topics, questions, and intellectual journeys that may eventually emerge in your own compost heap. That being said, you should begin casually collecting compost heap “scraps” early in the summer rather than waiting; this assignment works best when completed gradually across the summer—not all at once the week before school resumes.

4. Pace yourself.

Students from previous AP Research classes report that the summer work feels manageable and even enjoyable when completed a little at a time. A suggested pace might look like this:

- Late Spring/Early summer (May-June):
 - Breathe! It looks like a lot now, but if you take it in chunks, it’s not that bad!
 - Read the course overview/Skim the Course & Exam Description
 - Read/view 1 sample paper- write an annotated bib for it
 - Watch 1 presentation of oral defense (optional)
 - Begin casually collecting compost heap scraps
 - Look over the optional book options
- Mid-summer (Mid-June-July):
 - Continue adding scraps regularly (1-2 a week)—aiming for at least 8-10 by July 4th
 - Read additional 1-2 sample papers and complete the accompanying bib entries
 - Begin noticing patterns or recurring interests in your compost heap, so you can read more purposefully for your final entries
 - Begin reading the optional book
- Late summer (July-August):
 - Narrow areas of interest to 2-3 well-developed options
 - Reflect more purposefully on the last several compost heap entries
 - Draft possible research questions
 - Prepare summer thinking presentation
 - Finish the optional book

ASSIGNMENT 1: COURSE AND EXAM DESCRIPTION

Read the course description and course and exam description: It's important to know what you're committing to when taking this course. Here's a brief overview of the course from the fine folks at College Board that will give you the 30,000 foot view of the course:

AP Research, the second course in the AP Capstone™ experience, allows students to deeply explore an academic topic, problem, issue, or idea of individual interest.

Students design, plan, and implement a yearlong investigation to address a research question. Through this inquiry, they further the skills they acquired in the AP Seminar course by learning research methodology, employing ethical research practices, and accessing, analyzing, and synthesizing information. Students reflect on their skill development, document their processes, and curate the artifacts of their scholarly work through a process and reflection portfolio.

The course culminates in an academic paper of 4,000–5,000 words (accompanied by a performance, exhibit, or product where applicable) and a presentation with an oral defense.

The best way to orient yourself to the more granular elements of the course is to read (a thorough, prolonged skim is fine) the [AP Research course and exam description from College Board](#). As you read through the document, you may have questions, comments, or concerns that you would like addressed in the opening days and weeks of class. Please post those questions to this [question parking lot document](#). We will try to periodically pop into this document in the summer to check on and supply answers to your questions.

ASSIGNMENT 2: READ 3 HIGH-SCORING PAPERS & COMPLETE ANNOTATED BIBS

Comb through high-scoring sample papers: The final 4,000-5,000 word academic paper that you will produce for this course accounts for 75% of your AP score and significant portion of your MP4 grade. While that final product likely sounds daunting, it is essential to understand the shape of the academic paper so that *you* can have a gratifying journey in the class, just as these students likely did.

You will read three papers in total. One will be a common paper that we can use as a lodestar to refer to as a class and 2 papers should be from the remaining options supplied below (see appendix A) in the discipline/s that interest/s you most. (These are all high-scoring papers from students who scored 4s or 5s on the exam. To look at lower scoring papers, click on the title of this assignment and search for papers marked as Sample E, F, G, H, I, J.)

To better understand the process you'll eventually undergo, we invite you to annotate the papers you read (digitally or physically) to engage with them. Notice trends, such as how they're organized, what sections they contain, how they display data, how they make arguments, etc. Beyond that, we also encourage you to imagine the intellectual journey that likely produced

these papers. Each paper you read has within it an entire year of head scratching, planning, pivoting, revision, recalibrating, adjusting, etc. Take note of the curiosity inherent in each of these papers. Strong papers rarely emerge fully formed; they grow out of messy thinking, experimentation, and sustained inquiry, so as you read through these samples, imagine the process that led to the production of these pieces of scholarship.

To help you better understand what you've read, we also encourage you to read the scoring commentary at the end of each paper. The commentary should help you better understand the qualities of effective research writing and inquiry. Beyond that, it will clarify language used in the rubric, so that you can comprehend more clearly how you are being assessed by College Board scorers.

After reading each paper, create one annotated bibliography entry for each of the three papers you read. If you need guidance/a refresher on how to do craft an Annotated Bibliography, you can consult the links below. Please note, that AI is not permitted for this assignment; you must do this synthesis yourself. Your entries should be typed and ready to be submitted digitally at the start of the school year. More specific submission instructions and models will be reviewed in class during the opening weeks of school.

[Purdue OWL - Annotated Bibliography Breakdown](#)

[Purdue OWL- Annotated Bibliography Samples](#)

[Cornell University LibGuides: How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography: The Annotated Bibliography](#)

Our common paper, which all students should read, can be found here:

[Analyzing the Prevalence of the Mediterranean Diet Within Connecticut Facilities that Care for Residents with Alzheimer's Disease](#)

ASSIGNMENT 3: WATCH A PRESENTATION OF ORAL DEFENSE **(OPTIONAL)**

Find and watch 1 or 2 Presentation of Oral Defense videos on YouTube: The remaining 25% of your score from College Board is determined by your performance on a Presentation of Oral Defense (POD), a ~15 minute presentation of your research and its findings followed by a ~5 minute question session in which you reflect on and defend your work. To help orient you to the work you'll do in the course you may find it helpful to watch an oral defense video or two.

For privacy purposes, the College Board does not share recordings of the POD widely; they're meant only for teacher training (womp-womp), so we are not permitted to share them outside a classroom setting. Luckily, a smattering of proud researchers upload recordings of their POD to YouTube. We encourage you to watch a few presentations while looking at [the rubric that will be used to score your presentation](#), just so you have a sense of the expectations rubric-wise.

As you watch the presentation(s), think about the preparation and reflection required to discuss a yearlong research journey publicly. Reflect critically on what makes the speaker engaging, clear, authentic, or persuasive. Consider questions such as: What moments made you curious? What helped the speaker seem credible or passionate? What presentation choices helped complex ideas feel accessible? What aspects of the presentation felt especially human or memorable?

[You can find a selection of YouTube options here.](#)

ASSIGNMENT 4: CREATE A COMPOST HEAP

Generate a compost heap of sources: If you're not a gardener, a compost heap is a pile of scraps that slowly "cooks" and turns into rich, fertile soil. Compost heaps are messy, organic, and constantly evolving—and that's exactly how strong research begins. Over the summer, as you read, listen, watch things—and experience life more broadly—you'll gather scraps (sources/ideas) in the compost heap table linked in the title above. Some scraps you may stumble upon by chance in your summer travels, others you may seek out with purpose (especially if you have a strong sense of the topic you may want to research). Whatever the case may be, strive to add as many scraps as you can, but a minimum of 15 sources/publications are required. Your scraps may be comprised of books, scholarly articles, periodicals, podcast episodes, journals, videos, museum exhibits, etc.

The goal of the compost heap is not to arrive immediately at a polished research question or a perfect final product. The goal is to become more attentive to what genuinely captures your curiosity and to begin noticing connections between ideas over time. That being said, students in the 2025-2026 cohort of AP Research report that this assignment feels MOST effective/productive when you KNOW your topic of interest. While it is permissible for you to add scraps from any area or discipline that intrigues you and piques your curiosity, we strongly encourage that you funnel your compost heap entries down to the field(s) of study you are most drawn to. For some of you, eventually two or three scraps may be combined to form a unique research topic that is interdisciplinary. That's the beauty of the compost heap; disparate ideas *may* live side-by-side and cook down, but eventually you should look for connections between the scraps and pay attention to what makes your heart go pitter patter so that you read a bit more purposefully for the last few scraps (say, the last 5-7) you throw on the heap.

With that in mind, if you're someone who is approaching this assignment without much certainty about what field of study you might eventually research within, we recommend that initially you simply collect scraps without much commentary/synthesis; you might just initially use your compost heap document as a place to save links, ideas, and moments that genuinely interest you. Later in the summer, you can then go back and revisit the scraps. If you find yourself repeatedly thinking back to one of the scraps you added, days, weeks or months after you added it, that's a good sign that it may be a good topic to explore with more purpose for the 15 sources you'll eventually summarize.

This entire process will ensure you discover a topic/area of inquiry that is rich and fertile for you, but also know that as you read, you should be conscious that you are attempting to address a “gap” in the scholarly conversation—in other words, you’re looking to generate an original research question that it seems like no one else has directly addressed in your field of scholarship. Approach all scraps with this mindset.

A sample row in the table has been filled out to help model for you the depth of reflection that is expected. Brief reflections—usually just a few thoughtful sentences—are sufficient. We are far more interested in authentic curiosity and developing patterns of thought than polished academic writing at this stage. Therefore, breadth is preferred over depth here—so if the reflection process feels onerous, you’re doing it wrong. As suggested above, ideally this process happens slowly over the summer to allow for percolation and reflection on themes that emerge among your scraps. Don’t procrastinate. 15 sources in the waning days of summer WILL feel like a slog. 1-2 sources a week will be a breeze. Additionally, your scraps can’t “cook” if there’s no time between when you gather them and when you return to school.

In Appendix B you’ll find links that might help you find scraps, though you are welcome to find them wherever you’d like.

ASSIGNMENT 5: CREATE A SUMMER THINKING PRESENTATION

Prepare a PowerPoint, Canva, or Google slides presentation summarizing your summer thinking:

- Summarize your 3-5 most favorite/resonant compost heap scraps. Hint: It may be helpful to search for themes in the scraps you compile or look at a cross-disciplinary avenue to research. (Be prepared to summarize and share with your classmates what you found cool about these sources and how you could see these serving as inspiration for your potential research topic.)
- Use the scraps from your compost heap to pitch a few potential areas of inquiry/research topics that you would be jazzed to explore for a whole year (!!!). (While this is just a preliminary pitch of ideas/areas of interest, ideally, it’s not too far off from the proposal you eventually present before the Institutional Review Board.)
- Craft ~3 potential research questions for these areas of inquiry/topics. Ensure that you’re prepared to defend how these questions address a “gap” within the scholarly conversation.

If you need help developing a strong research question, consult this resource:

- [How to Develop a STRONG Research Question | Scribbr](#)
- Suggested length: approximately 5–8 slides or 4–6 minutes

Your Summer Thinking Presentation should be completed before the start of the school year and ready to share during the first week of class.

ASSIGNMENT 6: READ A RESEARCH-CENTERED BOOK **(OPTIONAL)**

You likely have been assigned reading a non-fiction book for summer reading for your core ELA class. Why not kill two birds with one stone by reading a research-centered book that will benefit you for both your core class *and* AP Research?

While optional, this assignment will demonstrate the many avenues researchers explore, while also affording you a more comprehensive look into a specific topic of interest than journal articles will. (It will also likely provide some worthwhile scraps for your compost heap—feel free to make multiple entries into the compost heap from the same book if it offers up multiple scraps.)

Many of the books suggested in the attached list (APPENDIX C) utilize models for thinking that may help you conceptualize the type of work of AP Research better. They also investigate a wide array of topics that may pique your interest; it would be helpful to choose a book from an academic discipline you are interested in (e.g. biology, history, linguistics, psychology, etc) to hopefully help spark an idea for your own research. That being said if you find a research-centered book that better suits your interests than one of these books, feel free to choose that.

The books on the list should be readily available in print and/or audiobook formats from local public libraries, or we may have a copy we can lend you.

Please note: there is no need to take specific notes while reading, though you might use sticky notes to flag a particularly remarkable section, or a section that inspires you in some way. In the fall, if you choose to do this assignment, you will lead a casual book talk/discussion about what you found notable and we will offer an extra credit grade to be assigned to the marking period of your choosing.

ASSIGNMENT 7: GET EXCITED FOR AN AWESOME YEAR!

We can't wait to meet you and work with you!

-Ms. Pronko & Mr. Goraczko

SUMMER WORK CHECKLIST

Before the first day of school, make sure you have completed the following:

MANDATORY ASSIGNMENTS

- Read/skimmed the AP Research Course and Exam Description
- Read 3 sample AP Research papers
 - 1 common paper: Analyzing the Prevalence of the Mediterranean Diet Within Connecticut Facilities that Care for Residents with Alzheimer's Disease
 - 2 additional papers from fields that interest you
- Created 3 typed annotated bibliography entries (1 per paper)
- Created and maintained a Compost Heap with a minimum of 15 entries using the provided [template](#)
- Prepared a short presentation (PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Canva) summarizing your summer thinking

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

- Posted any questions or concerns to the Question Parking Lot document
- Watched 1–2 Presentation of Oral Defense (POD) videos
- Read a research-centered book

APPENDIX A: High-Scoring Paper Examples

Arts (Music/Theatre/Photography/Film Studies)

- [Mama Mia! - Capturing the Art of Lighting Design: A Creative Approach](#)
- [Music Chemistry: The Formula of K-Pop](#)
- [A Reimagination of Abstract Photography Through the Natural World](#)
- [The Swiss Film Industry](#)
- [A Raw Film Analysis](#)
- [Evolution of Horror Movie Soundtracks: From the 1930s to the Present](#)

Business/Finance

- [Growth for Good: How Past Experiences Motivate Executives to Join Double Bottom Line Organizations in the Indian Construction Industry](#)
- [Using Sentiment Analysis to Predict Google Stock Prices](#)

Social Sciences

Anthropology

- [“Not Asian Enough”: Authenticity and Chinese Cuisine](#)

Education/Educational Psychology

- [Development and Creation of an AAPI School Curriculum to Counteract the Absence of AAPI Counterstories in Current Education](#)
- [Making Health Education LGBTQ+ Inclusive in Vermont High Schools](#)
- [Learning Through Cultural Barriers: The Impact of Hispanic Immigrant Parenting on their First-Generation Adolescent’s Academic Performance and its Correlation to the Imposter Syndrome Epidemic](#)

Gender Studies

- [Views of Sex and Gender in the Northwest Florida Area](#)

Linguistics

- [Adolescent Multilingualism: To What Extent Does Word Processing Speed and Reading Comprehension Vary with Natural and Tutored Acquisition Types of Multilingualism Among Adolescents at School X?](#)

Media Studies

- [Science Fiction and Career Aspiration](#)

Psychology

- [Conserving the Cute: A Psychological Analysis of Tucsonan Hikers](#)

Psychology (Environmental)

- [Neighbourhood Design and Community: The Effect of Residential Street Type on Sense of Community in Southern Ontario High School Students](#)

STEM

Science (Biology- Macro/Micro)

- [How can gut microbiota composition within SwHi and SwLo rats support or negate the Porsolt Swim Test?](#)
- [The Thin-Layer Chromatography Analysis of Phospholipids in Vibrio fischeri with a focus on Cardiolipin](#)

Science (Entomology)

- [Drosophila Insulin Like Peptides: Causal Neuropeptide for Fly Aggression?](#)
- [The Modification of Buildings Based on the Mounds of Macrotermes for the Purposes of Thermoregulation and the Elimination of the Need for Modern Air Conditioning](#)
- [Mealworm Metabolism of Iron and Calcium](#)

Science (Environmental Studies)

- [The Modification of Buildings Based on the Mounds of Macrotermes for the Purposes of Thermoregulation and the Elimination of the Need for Modern Air Conditioning](#)
- [Investigating the effects of carbon-based RF aerogels on DSSCs with the purpose of increasing cell efficiency](#)

Science (Genetics)

- [Special Considerations Concerning Genetic Testing in Minority Populations and Ethnicities](#)

Science (Medicine)

- [Testing the Effectiveness of Pulmonary Macrophage Transplantations to treat Pulmonary Alveolar Proteinosis Caused by Neimann-Pick Type C](#)
- [Accidental Viagra, Lethal Multivitamins, and Other Herbal Remedy Failures: A Content Analysis of FDA Warning Letters to Violative Manufacturers from 2005-2023](#)

- Analyzing the Prevalence of the Mediterranean Diet Within Connecticut Facilities that Care for Residents with Alzheimer's Disease

Science (Physics)

- Investigating the Hardness of Water on the Rate of Cooling and its Relation to the Mpemba Effect

Technology

- Quantitative Analysis of Android Permission Requests

Engineering (Biomedical)

- The Classification of EMG Signals using Machine Learning for the Construction of a Silent Speech Interface

Engineering (Material Science)

- Folding Under Pressure Exploring the Properties of Nonstandard Origami Tessellations as Folded Cores in Sandwich Structures
- Significance of Shoe Stiffness Deterioration in Carbon-Rodded and Carbon-Plated Shoes
- The Modification of Buildings Based on the Mounds of Macrotermes for the Purposes of Thermoregulation and the Elimination of the Need for Modern Air Conditioning

Engineering (Urban Planning)

- Neighbourhood Design and Community: The Effect of Residential Street Type on Sense of Community in Southern Ontario High School Students

APPENDIX B: Suggested Sources for Finding Compost Heap “Scraps”

Scholarly databases

WHS Library Databases

jstor.org | Some articles are open-access. Others require an account. Email one of us (cpronko@wsdweb.org or pgoraczko@wsdweb.org) with a title/link of any article you’d like to read and we can download & message you the article(s) you might be interested in reading

scholar.google.com

Current Events & Media

[Vox](#) | Explains current events and complex issues in politics, economics, and society

[Wall Street Journal](#) | News and analysis on global financial markets, politics, and business

[BBC News](#) | Global news and in-depth reports on world events

[Bloomberg Technology](#) | Technology news and business trends

[The New York Times](#) | News analysis, investigative reporting, and cultural stories

Tech, Design & Innovation

[Big Think](#) | Interviews with experts on topics related to philosophy, science, and culture

[National Geographic](#) | Documentaries and videos on nature, wildlife, and global cultures

[The Verge](#) | Tech news, product reviews, and futuristic innovations

[Wired](#) | Explores technology, science, culture, and design trends

Arts & Humanities

[TED-Ed](#) | Animated educational videos exploring a wide range of topics

[CrashCourse](#) | Educational videos on subjects including literature and history

Websites

[Google Arts & Culture](#) | Explore museum exhibits from around the world with interactive tools.

[Coursera](#) | An online learning platform offering courses from top universities and organizations worldwide.

[Khan Academy](#) | Free online courses and lessons in a variety of subjects that may pique your interest.

edX | An online learning platform offering high-quality courses from top universities and institutions globally.

MIT OpenCourseWare | Free access to course materials from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (STEM-heavy).

Podcasts

General Research & Multidisciplinary

Hidden Brain Explores the unconscious patterns driving human behavior.

Freakonomics Radio Delves into the hidden side of economics and human behavior.

Ologies with Alie Ward Interviews with experts across various scientific disciplines.

The Ezra Klein Show In-depth conversations on societal issues.

Big Picture Science Explores surprising connections in science and technology.

The Infinite Monkey Cage A look at the world through scientists' eyes.

99% Invisible A weekly exploration of the process and power of design and architecture.

Science & Technology

Science Vs Investigates fads and trends, separating fact from fiction.

Radiolab Blends science and human stories.

The Skeptics' Guide to the Universe Discusses science news and critical thinking.

Nature Podcast Highlights the latest scientific research.

Short Wave Covers new discoveries and science headlines.

JAMA Network | Provides insights into the latest medical research and clinical practices with interviews with researchers.

Social Sciences & Humanities

You're Wrong About Revisits misunderstood events and topics.

Revisionist History Malcolm Gladwell re-examines overlooked events.

Philosophize This! Accessible and engaging discussions on philosophical ideas.

The Happiness Lab with Dr. Laurie Santos Explores the science of happiness and well-being.

YouTube channels

STEM & Science

CrashCourse | Educational videos on a variety of subjects, including science, history, and literature

Khan Academy | Free lessons and tutorials in math, science, economics, and humanities

Mark Rober | STEM-based experimental projects and engineering challenges

MinuteEarth | Short videos about Earth's natural phenomena and ecosystems

PBS Eons | Explores the history of life on Earth and evolutionary science

Seeker | Daily videos explaining science, technology, and cultural trends

SciShow | Fascinating science videos on various topics, from biology to physics

National Science Foundation News | Videos on scientific research, discoveries, and innovations across various fields

APPENDIX C: Research-Centered Summer Reading Suggestions

General/Statistics/Data/Tech

The Signal and the Noise by Nate Silver

Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are by Seth Stephens

Invisible Women by Caroline Criado-Perez

More than a Glitch: Confronting Race, Gender, and Ability Bias in Tech by Meredith Broussard

Arts/Design

Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain by Oliver Sacks

The Design of Everyday Things by Don Norman

A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future by Daniel Pink

The 99% Invisible City: A Field Guide to the Hidden World of Everyday Design by Roman Mars and Kurt Kohlstedt

Psychology/Linguistics

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman

Superforecasting by Philip Tetlock

Drunk Tank Pink by Adam Alter

Nabokov's Favorite Word is Mauve by Ben Blatt

Situations Matter by Sam Sommers

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Tales by Oliver Sacks

Whistling Vivaldi by Claude Steele

Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions by Dan Ariely

Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter? by Heath Fogg Davis

Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know by Adam Grant

Saving Time: Life Beyond the Clock by Jenny Odell

Physical Sciences

Alchemy of the Air by Thomas Hager

A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking

Six Easy Pieces by Richard Feynman

The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain by Annie Murphy Paul

Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard

Food and Climate Change Without the Hot Air by Sarah Bridle

Education

The Teachers: A Year Inside America's Most Vulnerable Profession by Alexandra Robbins

Politics/History/Sociology/Economics

Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X Kendi

The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone by Heather McGhee

Freakonomics by Steven Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner

Think Like a Freak by Steven Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner

Poverty by America by Matt Desmond

Young and Restless – Girls Who sparked America's Revolution by Mattie Kahn

Politics/History/Sociology/Economics (continued)

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell

Flash Boys by Michael Lewis

The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America by Russell Shorto

Alexander Hamilton by Ron Chernow

The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded Americans is Tearing Us Apart by Bill Bishop

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson

Why We're Polarized by Ezra Klein