2026-2027

WILTON-LYNDEBOROUGH COOPERATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

SENIOR PROJECT HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content	Page
Class Purpose & Calendar	3
Mentor	4
Topic	4
Essential & Sub-Essential Questions	5
Research Journal & Experiential Research	6
Outside Expert	5
Applied Piece	7
Presentation	7
Reflection Essay	8
Grading Rubrics	9

CLASS PURPOSE & CALENDAR

The purpose of the Senior Project is to fulfill the *WLC Vision of the Graduate* -- to demonstrate that you are an effective communicator, a strong collaborator, a creative problem solver, a self-directed learner, and a responsible citizen -- by applying all of the skills you have developed during your high school career towards a project of your own choosing.

Completing the Senior Project

To complete the Senior Project, you must fulfill the following tasks:

	Task	Due Date	Points (if Late)
1	**Mentor Selection**	Tuesday, 9/8	2 (1)
2	**Topic Selection**	Monday, 9/21	2 (1)
	Research Check-In 1: 2 pages	Monday, 10/5	
3	**Essential Question Selection**	Tuesday, 10/13	2 (1)
	Research Check-In 2 (4 pages)	Monday, 10/26	
4	**Sub-EQs Selection**	Monday, 11/2	2 (1)
	Research Check-In 3 (6 pages)	Monday, 11/16	
5	**Applied Piece: Brainstorm**	Monday, 11/23	2 (1)
6	**Outside Expert Selection**	Monday, 11/30	3 (2)
	Research Check-In 4 (8 pages)	Tuesday, 12/1	
	Research Check-In 5 (10 pages)	Monday, 12/14	
7	**Applied Piece: Final Plan**	Monday, 12/14	2 (1)
	Research Check-In 6 (12 pages)	Monday, 1/11	
	Slidedeck Check-In 1 (Outline Draft)	Monday, 1/25	
	Research Check-In 7 (14 pages)	Monday, 2/8	
	Slidedeck Check-In 2 (Populated Draft)	Monday, 3/1	
8	**Completed Research Journal (15 pages+)**	Monday, 3/22	20

9	**Completed Experiential Research Tracker (20 hrs.+)**	Monday, 3/22	5 (3)
10	**Completed Works Cited**	Monday, 3/22	5 (3)
	Slidedeck Check-In 3 (Completed Draft)	Monday, 3/29	
11	**Presentation (including Applied Piece subscore)**	**Friday, 4/16**	50
12	**Reflection Essay**	Monday, 5/3	5 (3)
		Total:	**100**

Grading Notes:

- All 12 tasks must be fulfilled in order to complete your Senior Project!
- Extra credit (up to 5 points) can be earned by meeting the Research Check-In deadlines. *(Note: all 15 pages of research must still be completed if you miss the deadlines!)*
- Students who earn an A+ will earn Honors Credit for Senior Project.
- Students may also earn Senior Project Distinction Awards at Senior Awards night
- Rubrics for the following assignments are on the following pages: Completed Research, Completed Applied Piece, Presentation, and Reflection Essay.

MENTOR SELECTION

- Your mentor will be your guide through the Senior Project process, so it is important to select someone you trust and work well with. It may also be worth considering if your mentor has any experience/expertise in your topic.

- Your mentor **must be a WLC staff member**.

- It is important for you to meet regularly with your mentor, even if for a few minutes. This will give them an opportunity to check in on your progress, answer any questions you have, and offer any advice. You should decide on a weekly meeting plan as soon as your mentor agrees to work with you!

TOPIC SELECTION

There are two basic paths you can take when deciding on a topic: **Free-Choice** or **Community Project**.

- **<u>Option 1: Free-Choice</u>**
    - Choose any topic area that interests you! This may include:
    - ***Learning about something that you've always wanted to***, but have never had the time to, such as welding, dress-making, or fishing, to name just a few.

- ***Exploring a potential career***. Are you wondering if you'll enjoy a certain job? Senior Project is the perfect opportunity to learn as much about it as you can! In the past, students have learned about becoming lawyers, doctors, mechanics, cooks, investors and more. Some discovered that they had a true passion for the profession…others not so much. Either way, their experiences helped them make important decisions about their future.
- ***Diving deeper into a current hobby***. Do you have a current hobby that you participate in, but would love to learn more about it? Senior project is the perfect excuse to do so!

  Warning! Every year, someone chooses to dive deeper into a current hobby…and ends up regretting it because they feel like they turned their personal escape into a job. So make sure you think carefully about your topic selection if you are worried that this might happen to you.

- **Option 2: Community Project**

  - If you're struggling to think of a free-choice topic -- or you're worried about turning your personal passion into a job -- you can complete a community project. This may include volunteering at the library, interning at a local business, or developing a neighborhood beautification program! The trick is to find a community member or organization that needs help…and then help them!

ESSENTIAL QUESTION (and SUB-EQs) SELECTION

- Your **Essential Question** is the BIG question that will set the course for your entire project and all of your research. A good Essential Question:

  - Is **INTERESTING** and **NEW** to you
  - Requires **SIGNIFICANT THINKING** and **RESEARCH** to answer (i.e. it doesn't have a simple yes/no answer)
  - Is **NOT A THESIS**. The best essential questions are ones that you explore with an open and curious mind -- not ones that you take a side to argue
  - Can be **BIGGER** than your applied piece. (I.e. you might want to design a frisbee golf course for your applied piece, but your EQ might be, "How do communities benefit from outdoor recreation projects?"

- Your **Sub-Essential Questions** (or Sub-EQs) should support and add depth to your Essential Question.

  - You may not know what Sub-EQs to ask at the start, and that is ok! Most students end up changing or tweaking their Sub-EQs along the way anyway. A good idea is to get started with your research and develop your sub-EQs as you go.
  - **3-4 Sub-EQs are required**

- **EQ and Sub-EQ Example:**
  - EQ: What is life like through the eyes of a child with autism?
    - What is autism?
    - What causes autism?
    - What does a child with autism's day look like?

- How does a child with autism communicate his experience?

RESEARCH JOURNAL & EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

The Senior Project is, first and foremost, a research project. The quality of your research will have a direct impact not only on your Applied Piece and Final Presentation, but maybe more importantly, on how much you take away from the experience.

- **Research Requirements**
    - Your **Research Journal** must:
        - Include **15+ pages of notes,** *including relevant images and diagrams*
        - Be double-spaced, and use size 12 font
        - Be summarized in your own words! (You may link to articles, videos, etc., but you **cannot copy and paste text from another source**).
        - Include **10 strong sources**
            - Sources must include a mix of print, video and audio
            - Sources must include at least 1 book that you check out of the library
            - A strong source has expertise in the area you are researching
        - Include a complete **Works Cited** in MLA format
            - Note: Presentation slides must also be individually cited!

- **Experiential Research Requirements**
    - In addition to the media-based research, you must log **20+ hours** of experiential research
    - This includes, but is not limited to, interviews, internships, apprenticeships, site visits, observations, and experiments, as well as time spent communicating with your outside expert *and time spent working on your applied piece.*
    - All time must be logged in your **Experiential Research Tracker**

OUTSIDE EXPERT SELECTION

Finding an outside expert serves three purposes: First, it gives you an opportunity to practice asking someone you don't know for something, which is a critical life skill (think applying for a new job). Second, getting feedback from someone who has more experience and expertise on a topic than you do is often the fastest way to learn, particularly about more obscure topics. Third, it embodies the Strong-Collaborator element of the WLC Vision of the Graduate.

- **Who Qualifies As An Outside Expert?**
    - Cannot be a relative or a WLC Staff Member
    - Must be an *expert with credentials* in the area that you are researching
    - Must be available and willing to answer your questions as needed *for the duration of your project*
    - Does not need to be local -- you may communicate by phone or online

- **Do I Need to Track Correspondence With My Outside Expert?**

- Yes! You are expected to correspond with your Outside Expert on a regular basis for the duration of your project.
- You will track your correspondence in your **Experiential Research Tracker**.

APPLIED PIECE

- You will have a lot of flexibility in determining what to do for your Applied Piece, but it must meet the following requirement:
    - It must **APPLY YOUR NEW LEARNING** to make an **ORIGINAL CREATION** or solve an **UNFAMILIAR CHALLENGE** (in other words, it can't be something that you could complete without conducting research).
- Before you start your Applied Piece, you will first work with your mentor and outside expert to come up with three potential ideas (aka, your **Applied Piece Brainstorm**).
- Once you decide on an Applied Piece, you will need to fill out the **Applied Piece Plan**. This is simply a week-by-week plan that you will write to make sure you can realistically finish your Applied Piece on time.
- Finally, while working on your Applied Piece, you must log your hours in your **Experiential Research Tracker.**

Previous Applied Piece Examples

- Having researched the impact of the meat industry on the environment, you could write a vegan cookbook that outlines its environmental benefits.
- Having researched the history and design of motorcycles, you could faithfully restore an old motorcycle.
- Having researched principles and techniques of forensic science, you might write a story in which a crime was investigated using those techniques and publish the story to share with a wide audience.

The Following Are NOT Acceptable:

- Testing on humans or animals
- Putting a person's well-being at risk
- Brochures or letters to the editor
- Being paid, earning school credit, or earning community service hours for the work you put into your Applied Piece
- Using school facilities without first meeting with Linda Draper

PRESENTATION

The presentation is the culmination of all of the work you will put in over the course of your Senior Project: the research, meetings, Applied Piece, and so on. It is your opportunity to share what you've learned with your community and peers, and to demonstrate that you are an Effective Communicator -- one of the pillars of the WLC Vision of the Graduate.

Presentation Requirements:

- Must answer your Essential Question and Sub-Essential Questions ***through evidence of research***
- Must have effective supporting materials (e.g. graphs, diagrams, stats, visuals)
    - Sources must be cited in the slides
- Must describe your learning process
- Must explain your Applied Piece plan and outcome in detail, as well as the challenges you were (or weren't) able to overcome
- Must be well organized (most students use Google Slides or PowerPoint to organize their presentation)
- Must be between 20 - 25 minutes in length
    - Audio/video clips must not exceed 3 minutes in total
    - Q&A does not count towards 20 - 25 minutes
- Must successfully address audience questions

Other Presentation Considerations:

- You should **practice practice practice** your presentation prior to your presentation date!
- You should dress professionally for your presentation

REFLECTION ESSAY

The Reflection Essay is the final task of your Senior Project. The purpose of this assignment is to think back on your experiences over the course of the semester and how they have exemplified your growth in each of the areas of the WLC Vision of the Graduate.

Essay Structure:

- Your essay will be 7 paragraphs long
- Paragraph 1: Introduction
    - Provide a brief overview of your project (including your Essential Question)
    - Explain why you chose your project and how you believe it fulfilled the WLC Vision of the Graduate
- Paragraphs 2 - 6: Your Growth
    - For each of the 5 pillars of the WLC Vision of the Graduate (Effective Communicator, Strong Collaborator, Creative Problem Solver, Self-Directed Learner, Responsible Citizen):
        - You must: explain how your project and presentation demonstrate your progress in this area
        - You might: discuss your growth in each area by comparing your work on this project to work you've done previously at WLC that wasn't as successful -- and highlighting the key insights or experiences that helped lead to this growth
- Paragraph 7: Conclusion
    - What are the key takeaways/insights/lessons that you will remember from this experience and will take with you beyond WLC?
    - Overall, are you satisfied with your project and the growth that it showed in the five areas outlined in the WLC Vision of the graduate?
        - Are there any areas that you are particularly proud of?

- Are there any areas that you feel you still need to work on and why? Are there any areas of your project that you would do differently a second time around and why?

GRADING RUBRICS

Research Journal - Grading Rubric			
Quantity of Research:			
1 point per page; must be double-spaced, size 12, written in own words		1 - 15 points	
Quality of Research:			
Research lacks depth and/or breadth	Researched EQ and SOME of the Sub-EQs in depth	Thoroughly researched EQ and ALL Sub-EQs	
0 points	1 point	2 points	
Sources:			
Fewer than 10 sources	10+ Sources, but Quality/Variety is Lacking	10+ Sources; Quality/Variety is Excellent	…and includes a PRINTED source from the library
0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
		Total Points (out of 20):	

Senior Project Presentation - Grading Rubric				
Presentation Length:				
≤ 17 minutes = 0 points (extension may be required)	18-19 = 1 point	20-25 = 2 points	26 - 29 = 1 point	30 min. = 0 points (cutoff)
Professional Attire:	No = 0 points		Yes = 1 point	
Organization:	Logical and effective			4 - 5
	Logical but could be more effective			2 - 3
	Haphazard and/or confusing			0 - 1
Supporting Media:	Highly impactful			4 - 5
	Somewhat impactful			2 - 3
	Lacks impact			0 - 1
Grammar & Overall Slide Quality:	No grammar mistakes & slide deck is impressive			4 - 5
	Minimal grammar mistakes and/or slide deck is satisfactory			2 - 3
	Extensive grammar mistakes and/or slide deck is distracting			0 - 1
Evidence of Research:	Extensive and relevant to EQ			4 - 5
	Apparent but not always relevant to EQ			2 - 3
	Minimal and/or not relevant to EQ			0 - 1
Reflects on Learning Process:	Highlights extensive new learning			4 - 5
	Highlights some new learning			2 - 3
	Highlights little to no new learning			0 - 1
Answers Essential Question:	Thoroughly answers EQ			4
	Partially answers EQ			2 - 3
	Does not answer EQ			0 - 1
Overall Presence:	High audience engagement; speaks with appropriate pace, volume and tone			4
	Minimal audience engagement and/or speaks too quickly/slowly/quietly			2 - 3
	No audience engagement and reads off of slides			0 - 1
Q & A:	Audience questions are expertly answered			4
	Audience questions are sufficiently answered			2 - 3
	Audience questions are minimally answered			0 - 1
			Total Points (out of 40):	

Applied Piece Subscore - Grading Rubric		
Explanation of Process & Synthesis with Research:	Process thoroughly explained and strong synthesis with EQ	3
	Process thoroughly explained, but lacking synthesis with EQ	2
	Process incompletely explained and connection to EQ is minimal	0 - 1
New Learning Demonstrated:	Extensive new learning demonstrated	3
	Some new learning demonstrated	2
	Little to no new learning demonstrated	0 - 1
Overall Quality:	Overall quality is professional	4
	Overall quality is impressive	2 - 3
	Overall quality is lacking	0 - 1
	Total Points (out of 10):	

Reflection Essay - Grading Rubric		
Completed on time:	Yes	1
	No	0
Written in Essay Format:	Yes	1
	No	0
Writing Quality and Analysis of Personal Growth:	Excellent	3
	Good	2
	Poor	1
	Total Points (out of 5):	