**Research Project Preliminary Thinking:** Going from Topic to Topic Proposal

**Steps in the Inquiry Process**

1. **Look over the list of topics I gave you; pick one that interests you the most to start thinking about**. (If you can’t find an interesting enough angle after some investigation, you can try another topic.)
2. **Look for a connection to your life**. Related to your major/career aims? Related to your family background? Related to hobbies, interests, clubs you belong to, celebrities you admire, things you buy? To something going on where you live? To someone you know and care about? To something you have read/seen/heard about recently that interested you?
3. **Look for a connection to something that’s happening on the world stage**. Go to Google or some site where you can get news. Good ones include the New York Times online, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian (UK), The BBC (UK). Look for recent stories related to your topic.
4. **Find a place where people are discussing the issue in its current context**, read about it enough to get at least two points of view (ideally opposing ones). When you find a good article, look at the reader’s comments, too, to get a sense of the conversation.
5. **Play the journalist**: Generate a list of questions beginning with the “Five W’s + How”—Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How (See below for sample.)Two strategies: 1) Some advocate going through this one “W” at a time: ask all the “Who” questions you can think of, then move on to “What” questions. 2) Another way is to just do it stream-of-consciousness style, letting one question lead to another, letting them cluster up into subtopics.

**Sample 1 Look for a connection**: Some of the recent course material in this class about farmworker issues caught my attention, especially the fact that there are still slaves involved in producing products I buy (chocolate, oranges & tomatoes from Florida), especially since the store where I mostly shop for food, Trader Joe’s, has been the target of some activists. On the Web, I ran across an article about child farm workers in the US that shocked me, so I’d like to find out more about that.

**Sample 2 Play the journalist**: I did the second kind, stream-of-consciousness

How extensive is the problem? How many people know about it? Where is it happening? Is it going on around here?

Who are these kids? Where do they come from? What kinds of labor are they performing? How badly are the kids harmed by this? In what ways? How are their parents involved?

Who benefits by this practice (in general)? Who are some of the recognized “bad guys,” actual companies or indicted criminals?

How long has this been going on? What is the history of the problem in this country? What are the most recent developments?

Where else is this going on? How do other countries handle this problem?

What laws have been enacted to stop the practice? What agencies are supposed to oversee labor laws? Why aren’t the laws against this being enforced?

Who is working on the problem now? Who are the recognized experts in this field? What are they doing about it? What kind of help are they calling for? Is there an expert or organization where I can find someone to interview? Is there a relevant organization/project nearby where I can visit?

Where can I get more information about this: what books, articles, websites, and experts?

Based on the above pre-writing, preliminary research, you get to the topic proposal

**Sample Topic Proposal**

**Topic and Focus**: Farm worker rights, child farm labor in the U.S. today. (Or slavery?)

**Tentative thesis/Thesis Question:** What is the best way to wipe out this practice once and for all?

**Audience:** CA consumers/voters, people who care about social justice & want to promote it.

**Interview / Field Research**: Interview: David Batstone, Univ. of SF professor who started Not For Sale, and maybe Amanda Kloer of Change.org.

**Field Research**: Maybe attend rally in Monrovia, CA, put on by Just Harvest USA (Oct 21st) and/or volunteer with the group (based in Oakland). Will ask the interviewees for other ideas.