

Lesson 1 – Student Research Task Sheet

Aims: To understand that **academic geography fieldwork** at Geography Departments at University level often leads to the production of **academic journal articles**. These are seen as some of the most valid sources of research. For those of you completing ‘research’ based exams in Year 13, you need to start completing research from this type of reading and also to understand advantages of this type of research.

Background: How do we find out about the world? In A-Level Geography and beyond, completing thorough and accurate research is the key to topical, interesting and valid geographical writing. In GCSE and Year 12 it is likely that **field work** was the key component of your findings and research during your coursework/project/controlled assessment. In year 13 and certainly undergraduate level (for any subject) reading **academic journals** is likely to be a key way of finding out ideas as well as field work. In many cases (especially in geography where field work is so important!), you are likely to be reading an academic journal on a **geographer’s fieldwork findings**. In the lessons on the Gobi desert, by Dr Troy Sternberg, you will be reading a summary of some of his field work findings.

Key ideas & terms: Quantitative and Qualitative field work research, peer reviews, journals, bias, writing research methodologies in year 13 exams.

TASK 1 – Understanding how Geographers collect their research

Quantitative & Qualitative Research: Geographers at University will often complete both qualitative and quantitative research when conducting their research. **Quantitative** is numerical research that can usually be plotted graphically and maybe analysed statistically. Dr Troy Sternberg uses climate data collected by local researchers to help him understand the changing temperatures and rainfall in his study region. Historically, quantitative research has been the dominant methodology in the discipline of geography – especially physical geography, however the benefits of **qualitative** research have become apparent and is now a key part of successful research. Qualitative is data that is not normally in the form of numbers and often involves extended interviews and maybe focus groups with the aim of a much deeper understanding of an issue. As you will read in the ‘Ask the Expert’ piece by Dr Troy Sternberg; qualitative is the key to his findings. Look at some of the quotes on the board (power point) and sort & summarise these into quantitative/qualitative research methods and their pros & cons:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Qualitative Research		
Quantitative Research		

Understanding research methods in the Gobi Desert. Read the *Ask the Expert* interview article with Dr Troy Sternberg, which describes his fascinating and current research into natural hazards in the Gobi Desert, Asia. You can tell from this interview the number of advantages of academic research. Note down some ideas under the following headings (answers not necessarily in order):

- (i) Describe the research methods Dr Sternberg uses
- (ii) What are some of the key challenges a researcher faces during organisation and completing the field work?
- (iii) When researchers arrive back to their university; what are the next steps?
- (iv) Why does 'peer reviewing' make academic journals more valid & reliable than other sources?
- (v) How is academic research useful? What types of people/organisations might use it?
- (vi) Topicality – you could note down why this is especially important for geography students

Where can I find access to geographical journals? When you arrive at university you will have plenty of access to academic journals. It is likely your school will have **electronic** access via websites and passwords to academic journals e.g. QUESTIA. These can be difficult to search on – make sure you ask in your library/learning support centre/geography teacher for some help here.

TASK 2 – Other sources of research in geography. Use the web to start research on some other sources:

MEDIA - UK news websites, broadsheet websites, local newspaper websites in the place you are studying – Geography is a topical subject and the main advantage of using up to date media articles is to get very topical information. You must be aware of their political bias though. Broad sheets (and all newspapers!) are likely to be persuasive that a particular

geography problem/solution is worse/better. Journalists are unlikely to have completed as robust research as academics and you should be mindful of this as you read their conclusions in articles.

NGO/INGO/development charity websites – These can have some excellent sources of information – both geographical trends & ideas and also case studies. As with any source of information, be mindful of bias; some ‘over promotion’ of problems or solutions in the case of charities if it is a website that is trying to seek donations.

Useful websites:

<http://mongolia.wvasiapacific.org/>

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mongolia>

<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/about/offices-foundations/open-society-forum-mongolia>

<http://www.asiafound.mn>

LECTURES/INTERVIEWS- having access to geography lectures can be difficult at sixth form. However look out for relevant lectures run by the ‘Royal Geographical Society’ and maybe the ‘Geographical Association’ that maybe relevant for your Year 13 studies. There is nothing better than hearing someone talk passionately about the subject they are an expert and interested in!

TASK 3 - How to discuss your method in Year 13 exam reports

Many year 13 examinations require you to complete geographical research which you use to write an exam essay/report and you often have to include your research methodology e.g. Edexcel’s Unit 4 – Geographical Research examination. You should refer to the advice by your examination board, but it is often suggested to be a short prose paragraph or a table. You can have this after your intro, or complete an on-going methodology or have one at the end of your report.

Read through the sample methodology and highlight any aspects which are elements of an excellent method:

Sample Methodology

‘A wide range of research methods have been used in preparation for my report, to create valid geographical writing. In the run up to the examination I have used a variety of media sources for example BBC news and Channel 4 news bulletins and websites. I have researched on the Guardian website for find articles on food security issues in the last few years. I have also watched documentaries such as ‘Food Inc.’ and TV series such as ‘Jimmy’s Global Harvest’. The main advantage of using the media is its topicality which is so important in geography. However I acknowledge that some media sources maybe bias e.g. with a ‘left leaning’ or ‘right leaning’ stance, so I was careful to

cross reference opinions with my more neutral geographical text books/articles.

I completed research on the 'Questia' website – a portal for academic journal articles for example in 'Applied Geography', or 'Geography'. The advantage of dedicated geography journals are these are written by experts in their fields and often based on fieldwork research and are also very topical. All academic journals are peer reviewed which means they have been checked by several other academics for validity.

NGO/INGO and charity websites have clear and concise information, although I recognise they may be bias to particular solutions and sometimes out of date. A-Level specific sources such as 'Geography Review' magazine and also 'Geofile' sheets also provided up-to- date and non bias case study material. I feel I have produced a wide range of research which I will cite during my report and I have understand the advantages and limitations of different methods which I will consider as I build my arguments in my research report.'

Article/source and author if relevant	Publisher/organisation involved in producing the information	Comments about possible bias/reliability/topicality/peer reviewed/cross referenced
Key Hole Gardens in Lesotho – Bottom Up Development	www.sendacow.org Website accessed Jan 2013	NGO/Charity website – topical, clear and info. Bias maybe promotion of bottom up solution – to promote charity and raise money. Little critique of the solution on the website.

Independent Work:

During your research period you should keep a record table of your research sources – website names and dates. This will help you write your methodology and cite in your examination. You could use the table template shown above.

Homework: Next lesson we are going to be looking at Dr Troy Sternberg's findings from his fieldwork in the Gobi Desert. Before next lesson complete some web research on basic background info on the Gobi Desert. **WHERE?** **WHAT** (is the climate like? **WHY** is the climate like it is? **WHO** (lives there)? **HOW?** (is it changing – you might want to do some brief research on how Mongolia's economy is changing