Follow the Evidence

A model of how sources reshape a research question

11-12.WHST.7 "Conduct short as well as more sustained research; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation using multiple sources."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each version of the research question, circle the three sources the writer used, and number two places where the evidence leads the writer to change the inquiry.

What the Fruit Bin Could Tell Me

(1) I initially asked, "How can schools eliminate food waste?" That question covered every school, every meal, and several kinds of waste. To make a short investigation possible, I focused on whole fruit left uneaten after lunch at a fictional school, Westbridge High. My revised question was, "Which whole fruits are discarded most often during one school week, and what might explain the difference?" I chose a five-day window because I could observe each lunch without treating a single unusual day as typical. The narrower question also told me which evidence to collect and which claims I could not yet make.

(2) For five lunches, I counted untouched fruit in a collection bin before the custodians emptied it. I found 38 whole apples and 11 whole bananas. The district's posted menus showed apples offered on two days and bananas on three, so the raw totals did not show which fruit was more likely to be wasted when offered. A federal Environmental Protection Agency guide to wasted food described prevention as preferable to managing food after it is discarded. That guide helped me frame why the issue mattered, but it did not explain what Westbridge students chose or why they made those choices.

(3) The mismatch between my counts and the menus changed my question again: "On days each fruit is offered, what share of available apples or bananas is left untouched?" To answer it, I would need counts of available fruit from cafeteria records, not just discarded-fruit counts. I would also ask students why they skipped or discarded fruit, while keeping their answers separate from the counts. If cafeteria records revealed that students could choose several fruits on most days, I might broaden the inquiry to compare all fruit options. Five days at one school cannot establish a national pattern, but the three sources help identify a defensible next step.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the writer narrow the first question, and why was that change useful for a short investigation?

2. How did the posted menus change what the writer could conclude from the fruit-bin counts?

3. What does the Environmental Protection Agency guide contribute to the inquiry, and what can it not establish?

4. What new source would help answer the writer's final question? What finding could justify broadening that question?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a school issue other than cafeteria waste. In 80 to 110 words, state a broad research question, narrow it to a question you could investigate in two weeks, identify two different sources and the distinct evidence each could provide, and explain one finding that would make you broaden or revise the question.

ANSWER KEY

Follow the Evidence

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.WHST.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each version of the research question, circle the three sources the writer used, and number two places where the evidence leads the writer to change the inquiry. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the writer narrow the first question, and why was that change useful for a short investigation?	**The writer moved from eliminating all school food waste to studying discarded whole fruit at one school during one week. That scope made daily observation possible and limited the claims the writer could make.**
2	How did the posted menus change what the writer could conclude from the fruit-bin counts?	**The menus showed that apples and bananas were offered on different numbers of days. The discarded totals alone therefore cannot show which fruit was more likely to be wasted when offered.**
3	What does the Environmental Protection Agency guide contribute to the inquiry, and what can it not establish?	**It explains why preventing wasted food matters, but it cannot establish what Westbridge students chose or why.**
4	What new source would help answer the writer's final question? What finding could justify broadening that question?	**Cafeteria records showing how many apples and bananas were available would allow a comparison of shares left untouched. If the records showed several fruit choices on most days, the writer could broaden the inquiry to all fruit options.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

How can schools improve transportation? I would narrow this to: How often do late buses make students miss first period at my school during a two-week period? Bus arrival logs could show how many routes arrive after the bell, while anonymous student surveys could report whether riders missed class time. The logs would measure timing, not its effect; survey answers would need to be checked against attendance records before I made a strong claim. If many students missed first period even when their buses arrived on time, I would broaden the question to include other causes of tardiness.

Accept other accurate descriptions of how each source shapes or limits the inquiry. For the open task, look for a feasible two-week question, distinct roles for two sources, and a finding that logically calls for a change in scope.