

A SCAFFOLD FOR THE RESEARCH ACTION PLAN - STAGE 5 GEOGRAPHY

The following provides a simple scaffold for undertaking the Stage 5 Geography Syllabus requirement for students to “investigate a geographical issue through field work by developing and implementing a research action plan” (BOS 2003, p.41).

The example worked through in the scaffold is the “Urban Growth and Decline” topic as it relates to the fieldwork program Waterfront Workout by run by the Observatory Hill Environmental Education Centre.

The syllabus defines a research action plan as:

A plan for achieving a research task. It involves identifying an aim, asking specific geographical questions, identifying the data needed and the time and resources available.
(p.87)

It also specifies (p.17) that the following steps should be taken in the development of a Research Action Plan:

Step 1 - Identify the aim/purpose of the investigation.

Step 2 - Generate a number of focus question to be addressed by the investigation.

Step 3 - Decide which primary and secondary data are needed to answer the focus questions.

Step 4 - Identify the techniques that will be used to collect the data.

Step 5 - Collect primary and secondary data.

Step 6 - Process and analyse the data collected.

Step 7 - Select presentation methods to communicate the research findings effectively.

Step 8 - Propose individual or group action in response to the research findings and, where appropriate, take such action.

A methodical and well-structured Research Action Plan in Stage 5 is an extremely useful precursor to the Senior Geography Project in Stage 6. Although not as detailed the Stage 5 Research Action Plan involves many of the same research and documentation strategies and gives a prospective Stage 6 students a very good grounding in geographical research processes.

The fieldwork that accompanies the Research Action Plan is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the Stage 5 course, and if done well (and is also fun and enjoyable) is certainly an enticement to students considering continuing with Geography in Stage 6.

In recognition of this, at our school we make sure the fieldwork component is done at about the same time the Year 11 subject selections are happening.

Most of the recent editions of the Stage 6 text books now provide a good description of what a Research Action Plan is, elaborate on the syllabus requirements, and provide students with a general description of how to go about it, the different types of data and suggestions for presentation.

What the following provides is a common format for the writing up of fieldwork findings using a scaffold structured around the syllabus requirements and which teaches the students how a research report is written.

RESEARCH ACTION PLAN

INSTRUCTIONS:

You are to choose an issue associated with the Urban Growth and Decline topic from the list below.

- Drawing upon work done in class, your fieldwork, and research you undertake yourself, you are to develop a research action plan and fieldwork report.
- In your research action plan you will describe how you went about investigating your issue, and report on the data you collected, and your main findings.

URBAN GROWTH AND DECLINE ISSUES

- Renewal of port land
- Changing land use along the foreshore of Sydney Harbour
- Impact of increasing population densities in the CBD
- Urban renewal/consolidation policies and their impact on land use patterns
- Environmental impacts of urban renewal
- The role of technology in changing land use patterns
- An issue of your choice - to be negotiated with your teacher

RESEARCH ACTION PLAN - SUMMARY

1. *The Issue*

Define the issue:

- a) Where is it? What is its extent? (Spatial dimensions)
- b) What is it? Who/what is affected? (Ecological dimensions)
- c) Why is it important?
- d) Which geographical processes are relevant to the issue?

Research questions:

What do I want to know and find out about the issue?

2. *The Information*

Scope the information and data required to investigate the issue - “How do I intend to go about investigating the issue?”

Primary data sources: (data you collect yourself)

- Statistics
- Survey (questionnaire; interview etc)
- Collecting samples
- Observation
- Photos and maps
- GPS

Secondary data sources: (data someone else has collected and analysed)

- Books; newspapers; magazines
- Local council, state government reports
- Documentaries

3. *The Analysis*

What do I do with all my information? How do I organise and analyse it?

- Graph the data
- Tabulate the data
- Map the data
- Summarise survey data
- Sequence and label photos etc

Write a **report** summarising the data you have collected and your research findings.

4. *Managing the Issue*

- Who is responsible for addressing the issue? Which levels of government are involved?
- What can be done? (Solutions!)
- What is the range of solutions? Advantages and disadvantages of solutions e.g. cost; practicality of implementation; feasibility; are they effective/realistic?

5. *The Role of the Community based groups*

- Which community groups are involved in addressing the issue?
- Choose one, and describe its aims and activities in relation to the issue.

6. *Our Role as Citizens*

- How can I assist to address the issue?
- What sorts of initiatives can I take?
- How could community awareness about the issue be raised?
- *Don't forget your bibliography!*

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