

College Writing #6 – Between Research and Outline – Developing the Picture with the *FIVE P's of Snapshot Text*

Your accumulated research [organized in the computer or on index cards] sits staring you in the face. Here is where you exert your power over the entire project. Focus on the assignment, zoom to the audience's point of view and CAPTURE your Snapshot Text. This article describes the "FIVE P's of Snapshot Text" and how to make your best choice from them.

I'm sure you know about the 'Thesis Statement', we all learn that one in Middle School. Thesis Statement is one kind of Snapshot Text, but by no means the ONLY one. Choosing a firm, usable snapshot will make the structuring and final writing much more efficient.

1 - Promise Snapshot

An article that is intended to give information, like this one for instance, would use a Promise. One intention of the Promise is to let the casual reader know quickly if it holds something of particular use. Another is to reference the assignment given and show how the information fulfills it.

The Promise Snapshot is usually a single sentence that gives a specific promise of what will be found- for instance, a recipe, a checklist or links to useful web sites. It would be placed in an introductory first paragraph that described the usefulness of the information. It might, in some cases, be preceded or followed by a statement of the author's 'credentials' or background as an expert.

2 - Process Snapshot

Like the Promise, the Process Snapshot generally heads up an informational piece. It describes exactly what process will follow. For instance:

"5 steps to bone a duck" or "Step-by-step manicure"

In an academic setting this Snapshot might be used in a description of research method or experimental procedure. With some small adaptation, it would lead well to a timeline approach.



3 - Pinpoint Snapshot

This rather academic introductory paragraph describes the area of research undertaken. It should also Pinpoint the tighter research question, or research focus. Specific research sources should not be referenced here, unless an illustrative quote opens the paragraph. It needs no particular author credentials since the expertise of the sources is relied on for the piece.

Make very sure that your Pinpoint answers the requirements of the assignment!

4 - Position Snapshot

This is the Thesis Statement from Middle School. Use it to take a stand in a debate/discussion. Be obvious:

“The City Council should...” or “This essay will demonstrate that...”

It is preceded by a survey of the topic, often including a ‘nod’ to the dissenting argument. However, MORE important, it is followed by a preview of the argument/examples to follow.

5 - Placard Snapshot

Think of this like a ‘Headline’ or ‘Teaser’ or ‘Hook’. Unlike the other types, this is the first sentence or two of the piece. Its purpose is to entice a reader to continue. It might be a question, a quotation, an interesting fact or statistic

One of the other types of Snapshots might follow it or not.

A Placard should be used with caution in any academic writing other than a persuasive essay assignment. There, it would be a good start if followed by the Position Snapshot later in the introduction.



Once you have designed your snapshot, take a minute or two. Would your audience [instructor/general public/friends/whoever] want to read THAT article or paper? Will it satisfy the assignment? Does it strike the appropriate level of academic formality? Do you have the research or knowledge to back it up?

Is that the piece you want to write?

If you can answer 'yes' to most or all of those questions you are ready to go!

