Research, Writing, and Planning Practice
On a piece of paper...

• Write down one important question you have about human settlements—something that led you to be here today and study planning
Some Important Concepts

- Inquiry
- Observation
- Evidence
- Research
What is inquiry?

- Asking questions
- Examining facts, issues, phenomena
- What are the planning questions that brought you here today?
What is observation?

• Taking the world in through our senses
• Noting something, taking account

• What are some important things to observe when it comes to your important planning questions?
What is evidence?

• What we use to answer our questions
• Proof of conclusions
• Separate from tradition or authority?

• What would you accept as evidence for your important planning questions?
Research

• Lots of human activities involve questions, observations, and evidence

• What makes research different?
Research

• What makes research different?

• Research is systematic, methodological, rigorous

• Research is deliberate

• Research is done with a critical eye—healthy constructive nay saying
Research

• Why is research important for planners?

• The stakes are high
  – Health, safety, welfare, livelihoods

• The costs are high

• “Trust me--I’m a planner”

• Why is research writing important for planners?
Research

• What kinds of research will you be doing as a student?
• As a planner?
Secondary Research Writing

• Using existing literature, studies, and other materials to answer a question

• Like with other research it should also be:
  – Systematic, Methodological
  – Deliberate
  – Done with a critical eye

• Clue the reader into all of these
Secondary Research Writing

• Be clear about goal of writing → for yourself, for your audience
  – From this point on, goal of research writing is **not** to show how much you know about a topic or summarize all you read (Don’t annoy your boss)
  – Goal is to answer a specific question; or leverage evidence to make a point; or ask a new question about a topic

• Be clear about your method
  – How did you approach your question, how did you choose your sources?
  – What can you answer, what can’t you, limitations
Be a critical consumer of research

• How to choose sources?
  – Peer reviewed journals
  – Professional reports
  – Organization websites
  – Primary documents
  – Journalist articles
  – The weird dude in my neighborhood
  – Random websites Google turns up
Be a critical consumer of research

• Questions to ask yourself:

General:
• What kind of evidence is relevant to my question?
• What sources are likely to have that evidence?

About sources:
• What is used as evidence?
• What was the method? Was it appropriate? Was it appropriate for your question?
  – **Wikipedia doesn’t let you know any of this
• What sources do you give more weight to?
• Definition (Operationalization) of problem, evidence?
Finding sources

• What databases have you used in the past?

• Searches are an art (a methodological, deliberate art)
  – Refinement
  – Narrowing
  – Trial and error
Finding sources

• How many sources are enough?

➢ In grad school as with a professional career, there is no easy answer or magic number

• Depends on the gravity of the question

• Good to use the “law of diminishing returns”
  – After you have answered your question comfortably (given the gravity of the question) and additional sources are only confirming what you already know.
  – Pays to be clear and precise about your question
Getting started

• The dreaded blank page and the desire to fill it

• Good writing is good thinking (both take practice)
  – Begin by articulating the goal, the question
    • Why are you asking it, what do you hope to achieve
  – How did you go about it?
  – What did you find?
  – What questions remain?