The Big6: A Good Place to Get Started

Big6™ 1 Task Definition

1.1 Define the information problem. What does your teacher want you to do? Make sure you understand the requirements of the assignment. Ask your teacher to explain if the assignment seems vague or confusing. Restate the assignment in your own words and ask if you are correct.

1.2 Identify the information you need in order to complete the task (to solve the information problem) What information do you need in order to do the assignment? Your teacher will often tell you what information you need. If he or she does not, it will help you to write a list of questions that you need to "look up." Example: Let’s say the assignment is to write a paper and make a product about a notable African American. You choose Scott Joplin from the list that was provided by your teacher. She may or may not have told you why this person is notable. You need to figure out what information you need to find out about Scott Joplin. Here are some questions you may ask about him if you don’t know why he is notable:

- Why was Scott Joplin notable?
- When was he born and when did he die?
- Where was he born?
- Was his birthplace or childhood home any influence on his career?
- How did his childhood influence his adult life and his career choice?
- Who in his life were his influences or his role models?
- Why do we remember him now?
- What did he do that is an influence on my life or that of Americans today?

If your teacher told you that Scott Joplin is most noted for developing ragtime music, then you may add the questions:

- What is ragtime music?
- How did he develop ragtime music?
- What instruments did he play?
- Did he sing?

Of course, as you find information on Scott Joplin, you will use some that is not included in your original questions. Use these questions as a place to get started. You won’t waste as much time if you have a place to start.
Big6™ 2: Information Seeking Strategies

2.1 Determine the range of possible sources (brainstorm) This means that you need to make a list of all the possible sources of information that will help you answer the questions you wrote in Task Definition above. Consider library books, encyclopedias, and web sites to which your library subscribes (ask your librarian!), people who are experts in your subject, observation of your subject, free web sites and survey.

2.2 Evaluate the different possible sources to determine priorities (select the best sources) Now, look carefully at your list. Which ones are actually available to you and are easy for you to use? Circle these. If there are some that you need help using, ask your teacher, librarian, mom or dad.

Big6™ 3: Location & Access

3.1 Locate sources Figure out where you will get these sources. Beside each source, write its location. If it is a web site, list its web address. Try to use those that your teacher or librarian have linked or bookmarked. This will save you time. If your source is a person, figure out how you will contact him or her and make a note of this. Now, you will actually get the sources. You may have to get and use them one at a time. If so, come back to this step to locate each source.

3.2 Find information within sources Now that you have the source in hand, how will you get to the information that you need? (Remember the questions you wrote in Task Definition?) This all depends on the source.

A. First make a list of words that will help you find information in all of your sources. These are called keywords. They are like synonyms and related words to your topic. You can find many of these in the questions you wrote in Big6 Task Definition. Here is an easy way to create keywords.

B. Now make a list of the sources of information you will use. Beside each, note how you will access the information you need.

Book: Look at the index or table of contents for your topic and keywords
Encyclopedia: Use the index volume (usually the last volume in the set) for the topic and keywords.
Web sites that are subscribed to by your library (such as Gale, Worldbook Online, etc.): type topic and keywords in the search box. Try them separately and some together. Ask your librarian for help if needed.

Free web sites: use topic and keywords in subject directories.
Big6™ 4: Use of Information

4.1 Engage in the source (read, listen, view, touch) Most likely you will need to read, listen or view your source. If you can’t understand any of it, be sure to ask an adult to help you. It’s OK not to understand, it’s not OK not to ask for help. You are looking for the information you need. You may not need to read, listen to, or view all of your source. You may be able to skip around, finding subheadings and topic sentences (read the first sentences in each paragraph) that will take you to your information.

4.2 Take out the relevant information from a source It’s time to take some notes. We have help available on note taking and citing your sources.

Big6™ 5: Synthesis

5.1 Organize information from multiple sources Decide how you will put together the notes you took and ideas that you will add. You may:

- Write a rough draft
- Create an outline
- Create a storyboard
- Make a sketch

5.2 Present the information If your teacher assigns the product:

Make sure that you follow your teacher’s guidelines.

Add value to the product by including your ideas along with the information you found in books, web sites, and other sources. Make sure that your final product or paper is more than just a summary of what you found in the other sources.

Make a product or write a paper that you would be proud for anyone to read.

Include a bibliography. This is an alphabetized list of your sources. See the citation page for help. If you get to choose your final product:

Decide which product will best suit your subject. You may give an oral presentation using PowerPoint or write a paper. You may make a video or audio tape. Use technology if it is the best way to show the results of your information finding.
6.1 Judge your product (how effective were you) Before turning in your assignment, compare it to the requirements that your teacher gave you.

- Did you do everything and include all that was required for the assignment?
- Did you give credit to all of your sources, written in the way your teacher requested?
- Is your work neat?
- Is your work complete and does it include heading information (name, date, etc.)
- Would you be proud for anyone to view this work?

6.2 Judge your information problem-solving process (how efficient were you) Think about the actions that you perform as you are working on this assignment. Did you learn some things that you can use again?

- What did you learn that you can use again?
- How will you use the skill(s) again?
- What did you do well this time?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What information sources did you find useful? You may be able to use them again.
- What information sources did you need but did not have? Be sure to talk to your librarian about getting them.