Can you do this?

Benchmark skills for research and research-based writing and presentations, as identified by the American Diploma Project’s Ready or Not report.

Research:

As a high school graduate, you should be able to:

1. Define and narrow a problem or research topic.
2. Gather relevant information from a variety of print and electronic resources, as well as from direct observation, interviews, and surveys.
3. Make distinctions about the credibility, reliability, consistency, strengths, and limitations of resources, including information gathered from Web sites.
4. Report findings within prescribed time and/or length requirements, as appropriate.
5. Write an extended research essay (approximately six to 10 pages), building on primary and secondary resources, that:
   • marshals evidence in support of a clear thesis statement and related claims;
   • paraphrases and summarizes with accuracy and fidelity the range of arguments and evidence supporting or refuting the thesis, as appropriate; and
   • cites sources correctly and documents quotations, paraphrases, and other information using a standard format.

Communication:

As a high school graduate, you should be able to:

1. Give and follow spoken instructions to perform specific tasks, to answer questions, or to solve problems.
2. Summarize information presented orally by others.
3. Paraphrase information presented orally by others.
4. Identify the thesis of a speech and determine the essential elements that elaborate it.
5. Analyze the ways in which the style and structure of a speech support or confound its meaning or purpose.
6. Make oral presentations that:
   • exhibit a logical structure appropriate to the audience, context, and purpose;
   • group related ideas and maintain a consistent focus;
   • include smooth transitions
   • support judgments with sound evidence and well-chosen details;
   • make skillful use of rhetorical devices;
   • provide a coherent conclusion; and
   • employ proper eye contact, speaking rate, volume, enunciation, inflection, and gestures to communicate ideas effectively.

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1 The American Diploma Report, “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts” (2005) is available online at www.achieve.org. Excerpts used for this handout can also be found in “What Does It Mean to Be Prepared for College? (or for Jobs in the High-Growth, High-Performance Marketplace,” American Educator (Spring 2004), pp. 16-21 and 40.