Structure of your memo

This is a guide to what you should include in the Part 2 of the J5155 Data Research Project. You don’t need to submit an outline format or answer every single question (some won’t apply to you). It’s important to show your editor what you did to get to where you are right now, what you learned from your research and in talking to people who are familiar with the data and most importantly, what you now know about the data that will guide you on not only whether the data will get you where you want to go, but also what hurdles or pitfalls you need to watch out for.

1. What’s your topic and key question(s)? You might think your editor already knows this, but they are busy people, so a succinct reminder at the outset of your memo is helpful.
2. What is the data you’re hoping to find? (i.e. what is your ideal data look like in your head?) What would each record represent? What fields of information would it contain? If you would need more than one dataset, explain that here.
3. Your background research findings:
   1. Does anyone have that ideal data? If so….
      1. What is the data? Does it have an official name?
      2. What steps did you take to find the data?
      3. Who has the data?
      4. How do they keep it? (database? Paper? Excel?)
      5. How do they collect this information and from where?
      6. What do they use it for? Have they done any analysis on it? (if so, can you get a copy of the most recent analysis/report?)
      7. Do they send the data on to any other organizations?
      8. What does each record represent? Is it summarized?
      9. What fields of information does it contain? (were you able to get a record layout in advance?)
      10. Will it meet your needs? Make sure that it has any of the key fields that you need for your analysis.
      11. What format can you get it in? (Excel, .csv, PDF, other?)
      12. What’s the scope/universe of the data? What timeframe does it cover? (Both what’s available and what you’d like to request)
      13. How “complete” is the data? Is reporting voluntary? Is it from a survey? Is it possible its missing information?
      14. Are there any other flaws or limitations to the data that you should be aware of? If so, any suggestions for workarounds?
      15. Do the keepers of the data (or anyone else who has worked with it) have any other suggestions for working with the data?
      16. Do you have to file a formal request for it? (if so, with who? And how long might it take to get it?) Or is the data available for download or through some other means?
      17. If they told you the data is only available in a PDF or on paper – what questions did you ask to ensure that is true?
   2. If your ideal data doesn’t exist, what is available? Is there something that gets you close? Or is there something interesting that changes the focus of your topic?
      1. What did you learn in your research that made you conclude that your ideal data doesn’t exist?
      2. What steps did you take to find your ideal data?
      3. How is that data different than your ideal data?
      4. Would you have to change the focus of your idea? If so, what would you change it to?
      5. Also answer the questions from section “a” above
   3. Or, is your idea not at all feasible because the data you need either doesn’t exist or is not accessible or can’t be obtained in a timely manner?
      1. Tell me details about this.
      2. What steps did you take in trying to find data?
      3. What did you learn in your research that made you realize this was the situation?
4. What other news reporting (using data analysis) have you found that is similar to what you’re hoping to do? Does it provide any good ideas for how to move forward?
5. What academic type research (using data analysis) have you found that is similar to what you’re hoping to do? Does it provide any good ideas for how to move forward?
6. What are the next steps you will be taking from here? What, if any, hurdles do you need to overcome? What assistance/guidance do you need from an editor?