

## CHOOSING A TOPIC FOR RESEARCH

Following are some tips for selecting a topic:

- Find a topic that you will find interesting on a personal level
- Select a topic that you will do a good job researching and writing about.
- Select a topic for which you can find a manageable amount of information.
- Your topic must address a knowledgeable reader and carry that reader to another plateau of knowledge.
- Your topic must have a serious purpose, one that demands analysis of the issues, argues from a position and explains complex details.

Generating ideas for a research paper:

Selecting a topic can be a real challenge. Where can you get ideas ?

- **Your personal experience and interests:** What do you do, think about, talk about outside class?
- **Your courses:** there may be a topic covered in class that piques your interest. It may be appropriate for more in-depth research. You may also combine a topic of personal interest with some aspect of your academic studies.
- **Current events:** has something in the news interested or enraged you?
- **Current journals:** browse journals or the indexes of books in a discipline or subject area to find hot issues and relevant topics.
- **Talking to others:** sometimes talking to your professor is a good way to generate ideas for appropriate research topics. Collaborative learning can also help here: you can consult three or four students in the classroom about your topic.

## NARROWING DOWN A TOPIC

### Subject vs topic

A subject is a broad area of interest from which a more specific topic can be selected. Examples of subjects might be 'illegal immigration'. You can then focus on a particular aspect of the subject for your topic such as 'the impact of illegal immigration on the French economy'.

1. You can limit your topic by:

- **geographic region:** What environmental issues are most important in Southern Morocco?
- **culture:** How does Islam affect the life of every Muslim? How does the environment fit into the American Indian's world view?
- **time frame:** What are the most prominent environmental issues of the last ten years?
- **discipline:** How does environmental awareness affect business practices today?
- **Population group:** What are the effects of environmental pollution on old people?

2. **You can state your topic as a question.** How does illegal immigration affect the French economy?

3. **Formulate a thesis statement or make a claim about the topic.**

What kinds of claims do you want to make about your topic? Examples:

- claim of value: illegal immigration is bad for the French economy.
- claim of cause and effect: illegal immigration is causing high unemployment rates in Europe.
- claim of policy: illegal immigration should be stopped.
- claim of interpretation: Heart of Darkness is a mystical journey into the inner self.
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4. **Using keywords to discover ideas.**

During your search for a topic, keep a sharp eye out for fundamental terms and concepts that might focus the direction of your research, and help you narrow down your topic easily. One student, while considering a topic for his native American Studies course, listed several terms and phrases about oral traditions of the Blackfoot tribe:

Boasting	invoking spirits	singing
Making medicine	story telling	reciting history
War chants	jokes and humor	

The key words helped the student and set the stage for writing the rough outline, which ran as follows:

#### Native American Oral Traditions

Chanting	Narrating	Singing
For war	history	hymns
For good health	stories	folk songs
For religion	jokes	
	Boasts	

This arrangement shows an initial ranking of ideas, one that can and should change during the research process

#### Exercises

Identify three narrower topics for the following broad topics.

- Sports
- Pollution
- Politics
- War
- Freedom
- Modern drama
- Women
- Shakespeare's plays

Imagine that you have been assigned the following topics. Think about 5 keywords you might use to look for information on each:

- How does air quality affect our health?
- What are the barriers to peace in the Middle East?
- How can the National Initiative for Human Development help poor children?