



Selecting and Narrowing a Topic for Research

Tips on Choosing a Topic

- Find a topic that will provide enough information for the paper and allow formulation of new ideas from the ones already written by other writers.
- Choose topics that are of personal interest.
- Restrict the topic to a particular question or argument; this enables one to effectively explore the question in the number of pages assigned for the paper.

Steps for Finding a Topic

Preliminary Reading...

- Involves browsing through table of contents of textbooks that have different topics, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, Internet sources, and many others in order to find general ideas on a potential topic.
- Allows one to determine if s/he has enough materials to develop the research paper.
- Provides one with an overview of the subjects.

Select Topics that Are of Personal Interest

- Finding subjects that motivate one to find enough materials to satisfy his or her own curiosity on the subject and related topics.
- Relate the subject of the research to personal interests if the instructor has already specified what the subject should be. For example, if one's assigned subject deals with child development, and his or her interests are in linguistics, one could choose a topic that deals with language development in children.

Brainstorm Ideas for the Topic

This could include free writing, making lists, and drawing clusters of ideas to narrow down a specific topic.

Narrowing the Topic

1. Determine the intended type of research by asking the following questions:
 - Is this a research process that shows a step-by-step description?
 - Is this a critical paper that arrives at some judgment or conclusion?
 - Is this a narrative or descriptive paper of some aspect of the topic?
 - Is this an argumentative paper that argues for or against a particular idea in the topic?

These questions will enable formulation of a specific question that addresses a specific aspect of the topic in the research paper. Some papers might address all these questions, but others may just have one, depending on the requirements given by the instructor.

2. Write down the topic and all the categories or major issues, then study areas that are part of the topic.
3. Choose one major category and see if it has any more specific issues that can be addressed in a research paper.
4. Formulate a question that will allow the writing of a process, description, argument, narration, or critical analysis of the topic using all the ideas from the sources discovered during the research process.