

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH TOPIC

Every good research project has a well-defined topic. Selecting and developing a topic is an ongoing process by which you define and refine your ideas. You can then focus your research strategies to find relevant and appropriate information. Before you begin the research process, be sure that you understand the assignment, the purpose, and the requirements. Plan for sufficient research, thinking, and writing time for the project. Then define, revise, and refine your work.

Select a topic

- start with an idea in which you are interested. What do you want to know about?
- talk with your class instructor about an idea
- ask a librarian for help
- do some background reading in a general or specialized encyclopedia, or other reference to gain a better understanding of your topic. This will provide you with an overview and the history of the topic, identify subtopics and related topics, discuss important people and specialized vocabulary in the field, and basic statistics. Browse journals and newspapers for ideas.
- do some preliminary research to see what is available

Narrow your topic

- choose a specific aspect of the subject
- consider view point(s)
- focus on a time period, geographic location, culture, individual or groups

Make it a question or a thesis statement

- restate your topic in question form as a focused research question
- search to find the answer(s) to the question or the solution(s) to the problem

The research question or thesis statement provides the focus for your research.

Consider main concepts

- state main ideas, concepts, theories
- list key terms, phrases or vocabulary
- what are the issues?
- use the queries: who? what? why? where? when? how?

Analyze your topic

- what kind of information do you need?
 - scholarly
 - primary or secondary sources
 - books, articles, Internet, interviews
 - visual sources
 - subject or discipline specific view point, related or multi perspective

Select appropriate tools

- library catalog
- databases and indexes: subject specific, interdisciplinary
- other: personal interviews, etc.
- inter-library loan service (ILL)

First findings and evaluation

Test your topic ideas with the resources that are available to you.

- are you finding relevant information?
- are you finding appropriate information?
- mega hits - too much information? too little? no hits?
- is your topic too broad or too narrow?

You may need to narrow or broaden, generate other search terms, or rethink your topic.

Evaluate your information and resources

- is it authoritative?
- is it accurate?
- is it current?
- is it appropriate for your assignment?

Revise and refine

Think about the information you have found. Which do you need to revise?

- topic
- question
- search terms and strategies
- sources

-Does the information help to answer the research question?

-Continue to work with the information until you have achieved satisfactory results.

Formulate your own ideas and opinions

Think critically and creatively about your information and ideas. Draw conclusions and make connections based on your research.

Synthesize the information

Look at general, specialized, and related information, the history, and discipline specific and multi perspectives. Create your own ideas and opinions. Think about how your ideas fit into the bigger picture. Make it informative and interesting reading.