

Choosing a Topic

Sometimes you're given a topic for writing and research assignments, but often your instructor will ask you to choose a topic. Choosing a topic is an important first step in any assignment because it provides focus to writing and research.

How Do I Choose a Topic?

- **Always consider clearly the purpose and requirements of your assignment.** Thinking through what's really required allows you to choose a topic appropriate for your assignment. Ask yourself, who will read my paper and what is my instructor actually expecting? Will you have to compare and contrast ideas or issues, inform someone, or persuade them to a particular point of view? Review the technical aspects of your assignment. How many pages does it have to be? When is it due? How many information resources will I need? How much time do I have to devote to online and library research? Refer to your syllabus or ask your instructor, if any clarification is needed.
- **Choose a topic that interests you,** peaks your curiosity, or excites you. If you are given a broad topic area, referring to your own experiences, knowledge, or particular interests may help you focus and move to a narrower aspect of the larger topic area. If you have a personal interest in something that will often provide a connection with your topic and make the research and writing process all the better.
- **Explore your topic area.** Brainstorm a topic by asking yourself questions about it. Explore your topic from different angles or perspectives as if preparing for a debate. Talk to others about your topic, they may have good ideas or suggestions. Most importantly, do some background investigation using the resources found on the College Library Services website. Consult reference books, e-books, or magazine, journal or newspaper articles. (Referring to these resources can also help you select a topic.) Stop in a campus library and ask a librarian for resources that may give you further topic suggestions - or help locate background information on anything that interests you. Also visit:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/invent.html>
- **A good topic is one that is not too broad or too narrow.** Broad topics are too general and not focused on anything specific. When doing your research, you'll find too many books and articles. When this happens look at the "subdivisions" or smaller areas within the broad topic area. For example, you'd change the topic "Water pollution" to "Water pollution and the effects on fish." Narrow topics are too specific. When this happens, broaden your topic by using less specific keywords or topic descriptions. Be careful too in choosing topics that are limited too geographically. For example, you'd change the topic "Anorexia among 16 year old girls in the mid-west" to "Eating Disorders in adolescent girls."