

Choosing & Focusing Your Research Topic

Once you have read and understand your assignment, it's time to choose a topic. Sometimes instructors will have a pre-approved list of topics for you to choose from, but other times you may need to come up with a research topic on your own. Whether you need to write a research paper, give a speech or presentation, or complete another type of assignment, this guide is intended to give you some ideas on how to choose and focus your research topic.

Choosing a Topic

Identify Your Interests

- Pick something that interests you! This will make your assignment much easier.
 - Scan through the course syllabus to see what topics your class covers each week, and see if any pop out at you.
 - Scan the chapters of your textbook for topics of interest.
 - Browse through newspapers, journals, magazines, etc. to see what current issues are interesting to you.

Do Some Basic Research

- Conduct some introductory research on two or three topics that interest you the most.
 - Read some general articles to see what issues are under discussion and what scholars are saying. Some good places to start your research include:
 - [Britannica Academic](#)
 - [Points of View Reference Center](#)
 - [Academic Search Elite](#)
 - For each topic, ask yourself: is there enough information available on this topic to complete the assignment? If your initial search does not yield enough information, you may need to expand your search (see our tips below) or consider switching topics.

Brainstorm

- Identify some key concepts and ideas from your initial research. Think about the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* of your topic. Brainstorming will not only help you choose an appropriate topic, but will also help you later as you conduct more in-depth research.
 - Write out what you know, think you know, and what you want to know about the topic. What questions do you have about this topic?
 - What are some subtopics and related topics for these concepts?
 - Fill out a [Brainstorming Map](#) to help you!

Focusing Your Topic

It is common to change your topic through the course of the research process, so be flexible! You may need to either narrow or broaden your topic, depending on how much information you are able to find.

To narrow your topic:

- Focus your research on a particular time period.
- Focus your research on a particular region, such as a geographic region, a particular country or state, a local area, etc.

- Focus your research on a particular population, such as urban or rural populations, populations of a specific age range, etc.
- Look back at your research – what are some similar or parallel topics that you encountered in your research? Are there any that you could include in your research to expand your topic?

To broaden your topic:

- Alter or eliminate any filters that you are using in your research.
 - For example, focus on a less specific population or do not limit your focus to a particular geographic area.
- Broaden the time period you are studying. Remember that it may be more difficult to find information on recent issues, especially if you are looking for scholarly resources.
- Try using more general search terms in your research.
 - For example, try searching for “performance enhancing drugs” instead of “anabolic steroids.”
- Look back at your research – what are some similar or parallel topics that you encountered in your research? Are there any that you could include in your research to expand your topic?