

Selecting a General Topic

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Before you begin your research, you must select a topic. Although your instructor may give you a specific topic, you may be asked to select your own. If so, here are some suggestions which will help you pick a topic with which you can be successful.

Follow your curiosity

When selecting a general topic, look for one which interests you. You need not be familiar with the topic. Just keep in mind that you will be working with it for several weeks, so think of a topic that is likely to hold your interest. If you are interested in a topic from the beginning, you will be much more willing to invest time in the necessary research.

Select a topic you need to know more about

If possible, turn the research project to your own advantage. Use the research opportunity to solve a problem or answer a question. Perhaps you need to decide whom to vote for in the next election, what the career opportunities are in a particular field, whether or not a community service is working. One student we know wrote a paper on how to start a small business in her community, looking at licensing, locations, etc.

Look for a topic you will have the time and materials to research

This process is especially important for topics dealing with current events, topics of local interest, or specialized topics. Possibly your topic cannot be fully investigated through library research so you might need to conduct interviews or do field research. Remember, your paper must be factual, not conjectural, and must therefore be based on a variety of reliable sources.

Pick a topic you can approach with an open mind.

If you do select a highly controversial issue, make sure you can investigate it fairly. Be willing to suspend judgment and look at the issue from all viewpoints.

Possible Sources for Topic

1. Instructor lists of topics
2. Interesting topics covered during lectures or in your textbook(s). Look through course notes and your textbook table of contents; think back to topics that captured your interest and imagination.)
3. Current events or controversial issues you want to know more about
4. Issues or candidates you will vote for or against in the next election.

5. Problems that need solutions (community, family, personal)
6. Career-related topics
7. Decisions you need to make
8. Hobby-related topics
9. Reference librarian