Selecting a Research Topic

Wilmington University Library
We Help You Learn.

LIBRARY MISSION
The Library is an integral part of the Wilmington University academic community and supports the delivery of academic programs by:

- Collecting and facilitating access to information in multiple formats.
- Linking to global networks.
- Guiding our academic community to think critically in the evaluation and ethical use of information.
- Providing adaptive learning spaces and the technologies to support research and the creation of knowledge.
- Preserving the scholarly record and unique content of the University.

VISION
The Wilmington University Library is a destination for the discovery of knowledge, offering research guidance, essential information resources, state-of-the-art technologies, learning spaces, and a service-oriented staff guiding the transformation of information services and innovative collaborations.
Selecting a Research Topic in 8 Steps

WHERE TO BEGIN?
The ability to develop a good research topic is an important skill. Sometimes instructors will assign a specific topic, usually they will ask you to select a topic that interests you. Be aware, selecting a good topic is not always easy. It must be narrow and focused enough to be interesting, yet broad enough to find adequate information for your research.

#1 BRAINSTORM
Brainstorm to Get Research Ideas
Choose a topic that interests you and is relevant to your situation.

- Do you have a strong opinion on a current social or political controversy?
- Did you read a newspaper article, or see a TV broadcast recently that piqued your curiosity or made you angry?
- Do you have a personal issue or interest you’d like to know more about?
- Is there an aspect of your course you are interested in learning more about?

Write down any words or phrases that may be of interest to you.

Be aware of the following overused topic ideas:
You may wish to avoid topics like abortion, gun control, teen pregnancy, assisted suicide or legalization of drugs, unless you have a new and unique approach.

#2 READ
Read Background Information
Use the Library’s online databases to search for magazine, journal or newspaper article on the topic. Read a general encyclopedia article on the top two or three topics you are considering. Do a basic search on the Internet to find web sites on the topic.

#3 FOCUS IN
Keep it Manageable
A topic will be very difficult to research if it is too broad, or too narrow. One way to narrow a broad topic such as “the environment” is to limit. Common ways to limit a topic are by geographic region, culture, time frame or population group. Remember that a topic will be more difficult to research if it is locally confined. For example: What sources of pollution affect the Ogden valley water supply? Also, if the topic is too recent it may be difficult to find enough information for a research paper.

#4 LIST KEYWORDS
Make a List of Useful Keywords
Keep track of the words that are used to describe your topic. Look for words that best describe your topic. These words will be found in the encyclopedia articles and other readings you do while selecting your topic. Find synonyms, broader and narrower terms for each keyword you find in order to expand your search capabilities. Keep a list of these words to use as keywords later as you search in the library catalog and other online databases.

#5 BE FLEXIBLE
Be Flexible With Your Topic
It is common to modify your topic during the research process. You can never be sure of what you may find. You may find too much and need to narrow your focus, or too little and need to broaden your focus. This is a normal part of the research process. When researching, you may not wish to change your topic, but you may decide that some other aspect of the topic is more interesting or manageable.

#6 DEFINE
Define Your Topic
You will often begin with a word, develop a more focused interest in an aspect of something relating to that word, and then begin to have questions about the topic. For example:

- **Ideas**: Frank Lloyd Wright or modern architecture
- **Research Question**: How has Frank Lloyd Wright influenced modern architecture?
- **Focused Research Question**: What design principles used by Frank Lloyd Wright are common in contemporary homes?

#7 RESEARCH
Research and Read More about Your Topic
Use the key words you have gathered to research in the online databases, library catalog and Internet. Find more information to help answer your research question.

You will need to do some research and reading before you select your final topic. Can you find enough information to answer your research question? Remember, selecting a topic is an important part of the research process.

#8 THESIS
Formulate a Thesis Statement
Write your topic as a thesis statement. This may be the answer to your research question and/or a way to clearly state the purpose of your research. Your thesis statement will usually be one or two sentences that states precisely what is to be answered, proven, or what you will inform your audience about your topic.