

CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC

1

Pick a (manageable) topic that interests you



Try to pick a topic that you find **interesting**. This will ensure the research process is as engaging and fun as possible.

Ask yourself: What am I curious about? What questions do I have? What topic would I like to learn more about? [If you're still not sure, think of 3 things that interest you, even if you don't think they relate to your class. You might be surprised at the connections you can make!]

Also consider: How long does my research paper need to be? Choose a topic that seems appropriate for the length of the paper.

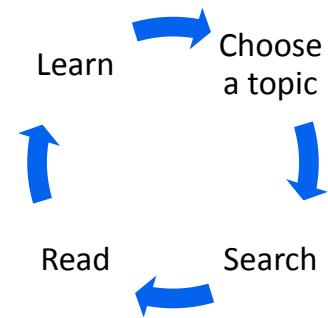
For example, "**American Literature of the 1950s**" is too broad of a topic for a university research paper. You could write a whole book on that topic! "**Depictions of Advertising in American Literature of the 1950s**" is a more manageable topic to start with.

Be flexible

2

Understand that choosing a research topic is a **cyclical process**. No topic should be set in stone.

Be prepared to change your topic as you search for information, read about your topic, and learn more.



3

Search for information on your topic

Search for information resources, such as scholarly articles and books, in the library catalogue and relevant databases. **What do you find?**

Search Results: 1 - 20 of 21,194

If you find too many information resources, your topic might be too broad. To make your topic more specific and narrow, try to zero in on a single aspect of your topic. Here are some questions to ask yourself to help narrow your topic:

- Could you focus on a more specific region, time period, or group (age, gender, ethnicity)?
- Could you focus on a specific aspect of your topic? (eg. Instead of just *video games*, how about *video games and socialization*?)
- Can you narrow your topic to a specific problem or question? (eg. Instead of just *video games and socialization*, how about “*how do first person shooter games affect adolescents’ ability to learn social behaviours?*”)*

Narrow your topic and search again.

Search Results: 1 - 2 of 2

If you cannot find enough information resources, your topic might be too specific. To broaden your topic, consider removing some of your criteria from your research topic. For example, instead of investigating *the use of Instagram by university students at funerals*, you might broaden your topic to *the use of Instagram ~~by university students~~ at funerals*. Alternatively, you might need to adjust the keywords you have been using – talk to a librarian for help!

Broaden your topic and search again.

4

Read about your topic



As you read through your chosen information resources, you will learn more about your topic. In response to what you learn, you may wish to tweak your topic further.

Don't be afraid to change your topic to reflect what you read.

Begin writing

5

Even while you're writing, your topic may change slightly. In many ways, writing is a way of thinking through your topic. **As you write—and think—you may decide to refine your topic to better reflect the content of your research paper.**

...is choosing a topic starting to feel like a never-ending story?

Don't worry. Keep in mind that **the heart of your topic is still your initial idea**. The tweaking and refining that occurs throughout the research process is simply a way of ensuring your topic is manageable and accurately reflects the findings of your research.

Exclamation mark and lightbulb icons made by [Freepik](http://www.flaticon.com) from www.flaticon.com

* Example from Neil Cunningham <https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/choosing-and-narrowing-a-topic-to-write-about-for>



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