NARROWING A TOPIC AND DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION

Narrowing a Topic.
Before attempting to develop a research question, you need to start with a broad topic and explore it through research.

☐ Choose an interesting topic. If you’re interested in your topic, chances are that others will be, too. Plus, it will be a lot more fun.
☐ Gather background information on the broader topic.
For a general overview, reference sources may be useful.
Explore this information and read about new possibilities to help narrow your focus.

Ask yourself:
• What subtopics relate to the broader topic?
• What do you find interesting about the topic?
• What questions are raised in the sources I read?
• Consider your audience. Who would be interested in the issue?

Go from a Topic to a Research Question.
After choosing a topic and gathering background information, add focus by developing a research question.

Your research question MUST include all of these criteria.

☐ Start developing a list of questions about the narrowed topic you are exploring. Think about what you want to accomplish with your research.
  ◦ Your questions should begin with words such as what, why, when, where, who, how, would, could, and should.
☐ Select a question from your list that will be the focus of your research.
  Choose a question that best meets your interest and purpose.

☐ Refine your research question. When writing research questions, revision is inevitable. You want to make sure your question is not vague or too broad.
  ◦ Conduct a preliminary search for resources. If your research yields too many results, you should probably limit the scope of your study. If you receive too few results, you should broaden the scope of your question.

Broad topic ➔ Narrowed topic ➔ Focused topic ➔ Research Question
Women’s health ➔ Women and cancer ➔ Women smokers & breast cancer ➔ Is there an association between cigarette smoking and breast cancer risk in women?
Video games ➔ Video game violence ➔ Video game violence & children in Japan ➔ Does violence in video games affect children’s behavior in Japan?

Sample Research Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Simple vs. Complex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unclear: What are the negative aspects of children and social networking?</td>
<td>Unfocused: What is the effect on the environment from global warming?</td>
<td>Too simple: Is euthanasia justifiable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear: How should school administrators handle student bullying on social networking sites like Snapchat and Instagram?</td>
<td>Focused: Is glacial melting affecting penguins in Antarctica?</td>
<td>Appropriately complex: Should passive euthanasia be legal for terminally ill patients in America?</td>
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