



Getting Ready for Your Research Paper: Step One – Finding the Topic

An informed choice is critical. Try to select a topic that enables you to examine a significant issue, carries your readers to another level of understanding about the subject, and has a specific purpose (one that demands analysis of the issues, argues from a position, and explains complex details).

When looking for a topic . . .

- Consider your own interests and experiences
- Discuss ideas with peers/coworkers/family/instructors; get feedback
- Cross-reference searches between library and internet resources
- Pay attention to current events via newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV
- Ask yourself questions about the topic; find answers in preliminary research
- Consider the parameters of the assignment (length of paper, purpose, etc.)
- Leave your options open– don't rule anything out until you do some research
- Make a list of topic ideas– don't give up after you've discovered one good idea
- Always have a backup plan ("plan B") in case one topic doesn't work out
- Keep an open mind about new ideas and perspectives

Your research paper will only be as good as the topic you choose, so choose wisely!

SEE ALSO Writing Center handouts "Brainstorming Topics" and "Freewriting" for further invention ideas.

Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers; A Complete Guide. Ninth Edition. New York: Longman, 1999.

