how to choose your research topic
brainstorm for ideas

Choose a topic that interests you. Use the following questions to help generate topic ideas.

- Do you have a strong opinion on a current social or political controversy?
- Did you read or see a news story recently that has piqued your interest or made you angry or anxious?
- Do you have a personal issue, problem or interest that you would like to know more about?
- Do you have a research paper due for a class this semester?
- Is there an aspect of a class that you are interested in learning more about?
read general background Information

Read a general encyclopedia article on the top two or three topics you are considering.

Reading a broad summary enables you to get an overview of the topic and see how your idea relates to broader, narrower, and related issues.
focus on your topic

Keep it manageable
A topic will be very difficult to research if it is too broad or narrow.

One way to narrow a broad topic such as "the environment" is to limit your topic.
focus on your topic

Some common ways to limit a topic are:

- by geographical area
- by culture
- by time frame
- by discipline
- by population group
derive keywords

Reading also provides a great source for finding words commonly used to describe the topic. These keywords may be very useful to your later research. If you can’t find an article on your topic, try using broader terms and ask for help from a librarian.
keywords

Keep track of the words that are used to describe your topic.

- Look for words that best describe your topic
- Look for them in when reading encyclopedia articles and background and general information
- Find broader and narrower terms, synonyms, key concepts for key words to widen your search capabilities
- Make note of these words and use them later when searching databases and catalogs
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. 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.
define your topic as a focused research question

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

Idea = 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?
research and read more

Use the keywords you have gathered to research in the catalog, article databases, and Internet search engines. Find more information to help you answer your research question.

Remember, selecting a topic is an important and complex part of the research process.
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.
formulate a Thesis Statement

The development of a thesis assumes there is sufficient evidence to support the thesis statement.
formulate a Thesis Statement

For example, a thesis statement could be:

Frank Lloyd Wright's design principles, including his use of ornamental detail and his sense of space and texture opened a new era of American architecture. His work has influenced contemporary residential design.
exercise

Identify three narrower aspects of the following broad topics. In other words, what are three areas you could investigate that fit into these very broad topics?

- Sports
- Pollution
- Politics
exercise

Identify a broader topic that would cover the following narrow topics. In other words, how could you expand these topics to find more information?

- Menus in Michigan prisons
- Urban planning in Flint
exercise

Imagine that you have been assigned the following topics. Think of 5 keywords you might use to look for information on each.

● How does air quality affect our health?
● What are the barriers to peace in the Middle East?
● Should snowmobiling be allowed in wilderness areas?
● How can welfare reform help poor children?