

PREPARING TO DO RESEARCH: SUBJECTS vs. TOPICS

You cannot do research effectively unless you have an appropriate topic in mind. This will depend on understanding the difference between a subject and a topic:

* **SUBJECT:** a broad area of interest from which a more specific research statement can be chosen. Examples of subjects include: illegal immigration, alcoholism, freedom of speech, computer networks, elementary education, astronomy.

* **TOPIC:** a statement that focuses on one particular aspect, event, controversy, issue, or dilemma within the larger subject. It's a relatively narrow area of interest that can be thoroughly researched and discussed.

Given below are examples of subjects and research topics:

SUBJECT	RESEARCH TOPIC
The death penalty	The death penalty does not lower violent crime rates in the United States.
Astronomy	There are groundbreaking scientific discoveries being made about life on Mars.
Illegal immigration	Illegal immigration lowers job growth in the United States.
The mass media	Media monopolies damage news reporting and editorial freedoms.
The Internet	The government needs to take steps to protect children from pornography and sexual predators on the Internet.

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A TOPIC

When formulating your topic, keep in mind the following guidelines:

* Don't choose a topic that is too broad or too narrow.

Too Broad: Homelessness.

Too Narrow: How many homeless are in California and where are they concentrated?

Appropriately focused: De-institutionalization of the mentally ill contributes to the problem of homelessness.

* Avoid topics that are too speculative.

Avoid topics in which you are merely presenting your own opinion on a philosophical or abstract topic. Good research topics allow you to find facts, evidence, and objective discussions.

Too speculative: What is the difference between a just and an unjust law?

* Avoid topics that are too bland.

Choose a topic that will be interesting and intellectually challenging both to you and your audience. Avoid questions that fail to provoke thought or engage readers in a debate.

Too bland: How was the Golden Gate Bridge built?

Initial Interest Research Assignment

Assignment: Briefly research at least 2 potential topics that you would be interested in exploring for our research project this semester. After choosing a topic, answer the corresponding questions.

1. Topic:

Why are you personally interested in this topic? Explain in 2-3 sentences.

What could you learn, and how could you personally benefit from researching this topic? Explain in 2-3 sentences.

2. Topic:

Why are you personally interested in this topic? Explain in 2-3 sentences.

What could you learn, and how could you personally benefit from researching this topic? Explain in 2-3 sentences.