

# Choose a Research Topic

## Introduction

Choosing an appropriate subject is a critical step in the success of your research project. It can be also one of the more difficult steps. So plan to allot a few days to consider ideas, investigate availability of relevant materials, and get feedback from instructors and librarians as you begin any research assignment. (You can make contact now with a research librarian at [Ask A Librarian.](#))

The following three steps form a process you might use to choose a successful research project topic.

### Step 1: Ideas

Where do you find ideas for a research project?

- Your professor assigns a topic
- You saw an interesting topic discussed on a tv news program last night
- You were interested in an issue an instructor mentioned in passing during last week's class.
- You have a personal interest or hobby that you'd like to write about

What if you don't have an assigned topic or a subject of interest like these above in mind? There are several sources available to suggest interesting, workable topics for college research.

**For current events topics, ideas for persuasive presentations, etc., try:**

#### [Facts.com: Issues and Controversies](#)

You will need your NKU user name and password to access this subscription website. Be sure to find the Issues and controversies tab in this new reporting site. Here you will find organized discussions of great research topics.

#### CQ Researcher

Location: Steely Library, 3rd floor Reference Collection

Each week CQ Researcher covers a different subject that has recently been in the news. Recent topics include road rage, drinking on campus, diet aids, gender equity in sports, plea bargaining limits, asthma epidemic.

#### Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics

Location: Steely Library, 3rd floor, REF BJ 63 .E44 1998

Many areas of human action and choice are discussed (advertising, educational opportunities for the disabled, courtroom procedures, business use of the environment, etc.)

**For topics in specific academic fields (such as biology, music, civil war history, etc.), try browsing through:**

- Current issues of magazines and journals published for that field. You can locate titles of these periodicals through [NKUIRE](#) with a subject search for your field and the word

## Choose a Research Topic

"periodicals. (For example COMPUTER SCIENCE PERIODICALS) Current issues of the publications you find through NKUIRE will be on the 3rd floor of Steely Library.

- [A subject encyclopedia](#). For many academic fields there are reference sources that provide summaries of the key issues being studied in that subject area. These reference sources can be excellent guides to workable topics for your research projects. In NKUIRE, search for your subject area along with the word "dictionaries." (For example, SPACE FLIGHT DICTIONARIES.)
- A research librarian can assist you to quickly identify periodicals or reference sources in specific subject areas. In fact, working with a librarian in Steely Library would be an efficient approach to selecting a specific periodical or subject encyclopedia to browse. Contact a research librarian now at [Ask A Librarian](#).

### Step 2: Refining an Interesting Idea

Once you have a general subject in mind for your research, help ensure a successful project by considering ways to refine, direct, and narrow your topic. All the subjects that you have seen suggested in the reference tools noted in Step 1 are complex issues --- involving many interrelated topics, competing interpretations of the facts, and interdependent causes and effects. Due to the nature of college research project, you will not have the time necessary to effectively study a broad subject such as "terrorism," or "the battle of Gettysburg." Concentrating on a specific aspect of these broader topics will make for a **much more interesting research project**. It will also be a project that is **much more reasonable for you to complete** in time for your assignment deadline.

How do you refine your research subject into a manageable topic?

Begin by examining the source that suggested the subject to you. See if you can determine how that writer or speaker would break the subject down into narrower aspects or factors. In many sources, you will see headings, a table of contents or outline to give you some initial ideas for narrower topics. If you are fortunate enough to speak to an expert on this topic, ask him/her for a part of the issue that you might be able to examine in-depth.

Consider some basic means to limit your topic such as:

- Consider only the developments of the past year
- Look at one individual's involvement with the issue (consider the early works of only one artist in the Cubist movement, even one piece of Cubist art.)
- Consider examining the issue in one geographic area (for example, water conservation efforts in Kentucky)

### Step 3: Initial Search Plan

The final step in developing a strong, successful research topic is to start an information search plan. Begin to make notes and keep lists. Include:

## **Choose a Research Topic**

- types of publications in which you expect to find information related to your specific topic,
- subject areas in which you expect experts will be discussing your topic,
- key questions that you have regarding the topic,
- specific terms and phrases that are used by specialists studying your topic,
- important names and dates related to the topic.

This list making will continue throughout your research and investigation. Having all that information at hand will make the searching and retrieval of research materials more efficient.