

Choosing and Narrowing an Essay Topic

Before choosing your essay topic, be sure to consider the assignment directions. You should understand the purpose of the assignment, how many and what types of sources you need, the length requirement, and when the essay is due. All of these elements influence what topic will work to satisfy your assignment.

Choosing the topic

Your topic should be something that you already know something about, something you would like to learn more about, and something you care about. Also consider what topics you react to, are puzzled by, are skeptical about, or which inspire you. When you have a strong reaction to a topic, you are likely to find more to say about it.

Evaluating the topic

To determine whether the topic will work for you and for your assignment, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I interested in this topic?
- Is the topic appropriate to my audience?
- What is my purpose for writing about this topic?
- Can I fully develop and research this topic within the time frame and word length required by the assignment requirements?
- Is the topic narrow enough (or broad enough) to fit the assignment requirements?
- Will I be able to research this topic adequately enough to satisfy the source requirements? Try an initial search of library resources and online sources.

Narrowing the topic

When narrowing a topic, you are actually making it more specific and easier to manage. To narrow the topic, look for a specific aspect of (or perspective on) the topic.

To test your topic, you should be able to move from the original broad topic to the narrowed topic to the specific issue to your primary research question to the hypothesis, which very often becomes the thesis. See example on the back of this page.

Example of progression from Broad Topic to Thesis

<u>Broad Topic</u>	Online courses
<u>Narrowed Topic</u>	The effectiveness of online courses
<u>Issue</u>	The quality of online instruction versus traditional face to face instruction
<u>Research Question</u>	Which type of course delivery is more effective—online or traditional?
<u>Hypothesis</u>	Traditional face to face courses are more effective than traditional courses.
<u>Thesis</u>	Traditional courses are more effective than online courses because face to face communication is more efficient and because students are more likely to be engaged in the learning process in a face to face learning community.

NOTE: The Hypothesis answers the research question, and the thesis includes more detail—often hinting at the organization of your essay.