Topic Identification and Selection

1. Introduction

1.1 Start

Topic Identification and Selection!

1.2 Welcome

Welcome to *Topic Identification and Selection*!

You can listen to or view the contents of this tutorial on the left menu.

To navigate forward click the NEXT button located in the bottom right hand corner of this screen.

1.3 Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this tutorial you will be able to:

●Define and articulate the need for information.

●Select and analyze a topic that has an opportunity for successful completion.

●Define a topic in terms of time period, geographic region, audience, and relevance.

●Recognize how to turn a topic into a research question.

●Identify relevant sources that match your topic and assignment requirements.

2. Topic Selection & Identification

2.1 Research Process

The research process can be a daunting endeavor, so it can be helpful to break things down and tackle it one step at a time.

Upon receiving a research assignment, your main focus should be on choosing your topic.

This tutorial will help you better understand the process for identifying and selecting a topic for a research paper, presentation, or poster.

2.2 Topic Selection

Deciding on a topic is one of the hardest parts of doing research, but it's an important starting point.

Your topic should relate to your assignment, audience, and available resources.

Lastly, it should be one that can be converted into a research or guiding question.

2.3 Select & Analyze a Topic

To help you decide the best topic to research, first you need to consider your assignment.

Has your instructor given you specific requirements for your research? The requirements of your assignment are very important when choosing a topic.

Click on the words in the thought bubbles to see examples of assignment requirements that can influence your choice of a topic.

2.4 Brainstorming a Topic

If you still have trouble generating ideas, try these strategies.

Talk with friends, classmates, or family members.

Consider those that have been covered in your class. Scan your textbook or course readings for one that goes beyond class discussion and can be approached in a new way.

2.5 Ideas Online

Explore ideas online through selected topic directories and portals.

Two ASU Library databases, O*pposing Viewpoints Research Center* and *CQ Researcher*, are full of topic ideas.

Other exploration possibilities are web directories, such as the *Yahoo Subject Directory*, or you may choose to do a basic search in a subject database to generate and focus ideas and determine if there is sufficient information to warrant pursuing the topic.

2.6 News Sources

Explore current events by browsing a local or national newspaper online or a national or international news site, such as BBC.

There's a good chance something will catch your attention and lead to an interesting topic.

2.7 Pre-Decision Browsing

As part of your selection process, you may wish to do an initial exploration by browsing a relevant database to determine the availability of resources that meet assignment guidelines.

Try some topic ideas in a database or to see what is available. You should quickly be able to determine if there are enough resources to proceed with your topic.

For example, if your sources need to be scholarly journal articles, a quick scan of a general or subject database may give you a sense of the resources available. If the only relevant information is an overview of the topic in an encyclopedia or several books in the library collection, you may need to consider modifying or changing your topic. A librarian is available to help you with this process.

2.8 Brainstorming Sources Activity

 (Drag and Drop, 10 points, 3 attempts permitted)

Brainstorming research topics involves generating ideas from various sources.

Drag and drop the best sources for generating ideas into the space provided.

Drag Item	Drop Target
CQ Researcher	#1 Sources!
Web Directories	#1 Sources!
Friends	#1 Sources!
Valley Metro bus driver	
Class notes & readings	#1 Sources!
Co-workers	#1 Sources!
Mall	
Billboard signs	
Textbook	#1 Sources!
Radio or television news	#1 Sources!
Newspapers	#1 Sources!
Guy behind you in line at store	#1 Sources!

2.9 Broad or Narrow Topics

If your topic is too broad, it might prove difficult to focus and translate into a research or guiding question. A broad topic that generates many resources makes it difficult to find the best information. If it's too narrow, you may not be able to find enough information. Like a tightrope walker, selecting a topic can be a balancing act as you weigh the factors that may impact a successful research project.

Let's look at examples.

● Teenage pregnancy is too broad, but teenage pregnancy at Northwest High School is too narrow.

●Immigration in the United States is a very broad topic - too broad to work with. On the other hand, looking at immigration in Glendale, Arizona, is very narrow with limited information sources available for your research project.

2.10 Narrow or Broad Topics Activity

(Drag and Drop, 10 points, 3 attempts permitted)

Let's practice identifying topics that are either too broad or too narrow.

Drag and drop the topics into the appropriate category.

Drag Item	Drop Target
Changing Afghan gender roles	Too Narrow
West Phoenix teen gang activity	Too Narrow
Homelessness	Too Broad
Winter tourism in Arizona	Too Narrow
Increasing bankruptcy in U.S.	Too Broad
Arizona education	Too Broad
U.S. Unemployment	Too Broad
Pregnancy dropouts in Glendale	Too Narrow

2.11 Geographic Considerations

Geography is not usually an assignment restriction nor are all topics defined by geography, but it might be an important factor in some cases.

For example, immigration in the United States is too broad for a short assignment. If you limit immigration to a geographic region, such as the Southwest or Arizona, that helps.

Local topics may generate interest, but finding enough quality resources can be difficult. If you need scholarly resources, but choose a recent city ordinance as your topic, you likely will encounter problems. Newspapers are the primary source for information about recent localized issues, because it can take several years for scholarly studies to be conducted and published.

2.12 Date Considerations

Be aware of any restrictions in your assignment in terms of publication date of sources.

Do they need to be current, say in the last 5 to 10 years, or is the content of the resource rather than the date of publication the deciding factor?

Disciplines such as history are not especially concerned about when a book or journal article was published because of the emphasis on historical events, but business or the health sciences field generally requires current information.

Publication date restrictions in the assignment or the time period being researched may impact the amount and quality of information available and need to be factored into your plan.

2.13 Audience

Be sure to consider who your audience is (i.e. who is your assignment geared toward?).

Elements to think about are: age, gender, education level, values, and interests.

Ask yourself: How much does your audience know about your topic?

Will they be interested in, opposed to, or in favor of your topic?

Will you need to define any terms? How much background information should you provide?

2.14 Topic Relevance

It's also important to consider the relevance of your topic, which needs to meet all of the qualifications of your assignment.

Does your topic make sense, given the final format of your project?

When selecting a topic for a presentation or poster, you want to ensure that information translates visually without the in-depth explanation a 20-page research paper allows.

Unless otherwise stated in your assignment, it is important that your topic is current and still suitable for discussion.

2.15 Topic to Question

Think of research as a search for an answer.

What exactly do you want to know? Start by turning your topic into a question.

This is where having a narrower topic may come in handy - you want to evaluate a specific aspect of it.

For example, the topic of Arizona education might become this research question: What impact have the legislative budget cuts had on the quality of student learning in Arizona's schools?

In this case, just searching for a broad generalization will not generate very useful results.

2.16 Background Research

Once you've chosen your topic, consider conducting background research.

Background searches are important because they provide a larger context of information and understanding about your topic.

The ASU Library has multidisciplinary databases such as Gale Virtual Reference Library that provide an overview of topics and help identify new keywords or ideas.

They also identify additional resources on your topic.

To learn more about locating and using background sources, view the *Finding & Using Background Research* tutorial.

2.17 Topic Decision Activity

(Drag and Drop, 10 points, 3 attempts permitted)

Factors to Consider in Selecting a Final Topic Activity

Drag and drop the most important factors to consider into the space provided.

Drag Item	Drop Target
Can convert into a question	Important Stuff
Easy	

	Important Stuff
Sufficient information accessible	
Significance	Important Stuff
Time period	Important Stuff
Time to complete	Important Stuff
Friend's topic	
Geography	Important Stuff
Assignment	Important Stuff
Family	
Audience	Important Stuff
Available scholarly resources	
Semester	
End product (paper, presentation)	Important Stuff

3. Conclusion

3.1 Learning Outcomes

Now that you have completed this tutorial, you can:
- Define and articulate the need for information
- Select and analyze a topic that has an opportunity for successful completion
    - by brainstorming interests
    - identifying general subjects to research
    - describing how to broaden or narrow your topic as needed
- Define a topic in terms of time period, geographic region, audience, & relevance

●Recognize how to turn a topic into a research question
●Identify relevant sources that match a topic with assignment requirements.

3.2 *Conclusion*

Congratulations, you have completed *Topic Identification and Selection*.

Click on "Tutorials" to return to the Tutorials page or "Next" to complete a brief quiz.