

UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC

Selecting a Topic that Interests You

You'll write a better research paper if you choose a topic that you are truly interested in. Perhaps you think you don't have any ideas, but that is very rarely the case! Here are some simple tricks you can use to help brainstorm a great topic:

1. If the assignment requires you to create your own topic, try making a list of things that annoy you. Frustration is a strong emotion that you can redirect into a positive effort. Of course, not everything on your list will be an appropriate topic, but it's a great way to generate ideas.
2. Another approach is to make a list of your personal interests. If something is interesting to you, you're more likely to enjoy researching it. Ask yourself the following: What do I like to read about? What do I like to do in my free time? Where would I like to volunteer? What's my favorite subject in school? What kind of career do I want?
3. Look at your lists of frustrations and interests. Now, make a list of potential paper topics where the two overlap.
4. Choose the topic that you find the most compelling and write three to five questions you have about this topic.
5. Now what about this topic gets your attention? What would you like to learn about it? Where can you find information? Can you imagine a possible motive or thesis for it?

Asking questions like these will help you focus your research project. Choose a topic that interests you, but also one that generates a significant amount of research material. This way, you'll have both the personal drive and the sources you need to produce a strong paper that your audience will want to read.

Credit: University Writing Center, 2020. Adapted from Cengage Learning, How to Research: Videos and Tutorials.

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

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