

## Quick Guide :: Choosing a Research Topic

### The First Step

Choosing a topic can often be the most challenging part of a research assignment, especially if your instructor asks you to write or talk about anything you want.

The first step is: **Define your assignment.**

To do this considering the following questions:

- : What kind of research project are you doing?** (Term paper, speech, debate)
- : What is its length?** (5 pages, 10 pages)
- : How long do you have to complete it?**  
(2 days, 2 weeks, 2 months)
- : What kind of resources do you need?**  
(Books, scholarly journals, primary resources, literary criticisms)

### Where To Get Ideas

Ideas can come from just about anywhere...

- : Start with yourself.** Select a topic that interests you... one you know something about or want to know something about.
- : Review course materials.** Ideas can come from issues and subjects covered in course readings and lectures.
- : Ask your instructor.** Your instructor can be an excellent source for topic suggestions, as well as recommend readings.
- : Check an encyclopedia.** Review general and specialized encyclopedia articles. They can provide summaries and bibliographies to get you started on a topic.
- : Conduct preliminary searches in an article database.** A quick search in a multidisciplinary article or newspaper database can provide a multitude of topic ideas. Try Expanded Academic ASAP, Lexis/Nexis, or CQ Researcher.
- : Talk to a librarian:** Your librarian can be a great source for topic ideas, as well as provide information about helpful research resources.

*Adapted from UC Davis Library*

### Resources on the Web

There are many places on the World Wide Web that offer resources for choosing a topic. Here are some suggestions:

#### **: Best Information on the Net: Paper Topics**

<http://library.sau.edu/bestinfo/Hot/hotindex.htm>

A listing of WWW sites on various current topics such as affirmative action, the death penalty, and welfare reform.

#### **: Public Agenda Topics**

<http://www.publicagenda.org>

A nonprofit public opinion research and education organization website that contains excellent overviews, research reports and articles on major controversial topics.

#### **: Backgrounders From the Online NewsHour**

<http://speakout.com/activism/issues>

A public TV news program that offers transcripts of discussions on issues under broad categories such as Congress, the economy, the military, transportation, religion, etc.

### Resources at the Library

Ask a librarian! We can help you find topic selection resources in the subject area related to your research assignment.

#### **: Opposing Viewpoints Series**

This print series focuses on current controversial topics of debate, presenting pro/con arguments by prominent spokespeople representing different aspects of issues.

[NOTE: Do a **title search** in the MERLIN Catalog]

### Helpful Handouts

Once you've chosen a topic, the following handouts may be useful. Available online at

<http://mulibraries.missouri.edu/guides/classetours/quickguides.htm>

- : 5 Steps to Better Library Research**
- : Constructing a Search Statement**
- : Navigating the Information Landscape**
- : Evaluation of Information Sources**