

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 minutes)
- : **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 criticism)

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.
- : **Talk to friends and classmates.** Discussing potential topics with friends and classmates can help you identify interesting questions surrounding a topic.
- : **Consult with 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.
- : **Talk to a librarian.** Your librarian can be a great source for topic ideas, and can provide information about helpful research resources.

Resources on the Web

There are many places on the Web that offer resources for choosing a topic. Here are a couple of suggestions:

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

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

A listing of 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.

Resources at the Library

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

: **Contemporary World Issues Series**

This print series focuses on current topics of debate. Titles include overviews of controversial issues, plus lists of additional relevant sources

[NOTE: To view the list of titles in this series, use the *Browse Search: Series Title Begins* option in the Harvest Catalog]

: **Preliminary searches in an article database**

A quick search in a multidisciplinary article or newspaper database can provide a multitude of topic ideas. Try Academic Search Complete, Access World News, or CQ Researcher.

Helpful Handouts

Once you've chosen a topic, the following handouts may be useful. Available online @ www.lib.ucdavis.edu/dept/instruc/research/guides

- : **5 Steps to Better Library Research**
- : **Find a Book**
- : **Find Journal Articles**