

5 Be Flexible

- ◆ It is common to modify your topic during the research process.
- ◆ Keep in mind the assigned length of the research paper, project or research assignment.



6 Define Your Topic

- ◆ You will often begin with a word, develop a more focused interest in an aspect of something relating to that word, and then begin to have questions about the topic.

For example:

- **Ideas-** Frank Lloyd Wright or modern architecture
- **Research Question-** How has Frank Lloyd Wright influenced modern architecture?
- **Focused Research Question-** What design principles used by Frank Lloyd Wright are common in contemporary homes?

7 Research and Read More About Your Topic

- ◆ Use the key words you have gathered to research in the catalog, article databases and Internet search engines. Find more information to help answer your research question.
- ◆ You will need to do some research and reading before you select your final topic. Can you find enough information to answer your research question? Remember, selecting a topic is an important and complex part of the research process.

APA Style and Paper Writing

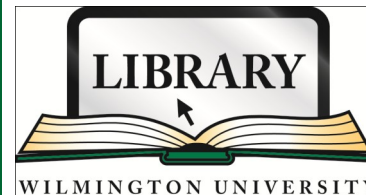
The official guide to writing and formatting APA-style papers is the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association and is available at the Library.

More helpful QuickGuides are available from the Library website

www.wilmu.edu/library/quickguides

For further information, please call

1-800-451-5724



Selecting a Research Topic

WILMU.EDU/LIBRARY

Steps to Selecting a Research Topic

1 Brainstorm to Get Research Ideas

- ◆ Choose a topic that interests you and is relevant to your situation.
 - Do you have a strong opinion on a current social or political controversy?
 - Did you read a newspaper article, or see a TV broadcast recently that piqued your curiosity or made you angry or anxious?
 - Do you have a personal issue, problem, or interest you'd like to know more about?
 - Do you have other research papers due in a class this semester?
 - Is there an aspect of one of your courses you are interested in learning more about?
- ◆ Look at some of the following topically oriented web sites and research sites for ideas:

Are you interested in current events, government, politics or the social sciences?

America.gov
<http://www.america.gov/>

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

Are you interested in the Humanities: art, literature, music?

National Endowment for the Humanities
http://edsitement.neh.gov/websites_all.asp

Voice of the Shuttle <http://vos.ucsb.edu/>

Are you interested in health or medicine?

Healthfinder <http://www.healthfinder.gov/>

MedlinePlus <http://medlineplus.gov/>

For many other subject areas, try:

Electra Guide <http://www.ozline.com/electraguide/>

The Scout Report <http://scout.wisc.edu/index.php>

New York Times- Knowledge Network
<http://www.nytimes.com/college/>

2 Read General Background Information

- ◆ Read a general encyclopedia article on the top two or three topics you are considering.
- ◆ Use the Library's research databases to search for current magazine, journal or newspaper articles on the topic.
- ◆ Use Web search engines to find Web sites on the topic.

3 Focus In on Your Topic

- ◆ Keep it manageable. A topic will be very difficult to research if it is too broad, or too narrow. One way to narrow a broad topic is to limit. Common ways to limit a topic are:
 - by geographic region
 - by culture
 - by time frame

- by discipline
- by population group
- ◆ Remember that a topic will be more difficult to research if it is too:
 - locally confined- Topics too specific may only be covered in local newspapers.
 - recent- Be aware if a topic is so recent that books and journal articles haven't been written, but newspaper and magazine articles have.
 - broadly interdisciplinary- You could be overwhelmed with superficial information .
 - popular- entertainers, for example.

4 Make a List of Useful Keywords

- ◆ Keep track of the words that are used to describe your topic.
 - Look for words that best describe your topic.
 - These words will be found in the encyclopedia articles and other readings you do while selecting your topic.
 - Find synonyms, broader and narrower terms for each keyword you find in order to expand your search capabilities.
- Keep a list of these words to use as keywords later as you search in catalogs and other online databases.

