

APSU Writing Center

Establishing a Research Question

Narrowing a Topic

- Narrowing down your topic is essential for clarifying your focus and objectives when writing. One effective way to achieve this is by establishing a specific research question.

1. Start with a Broad Topic

- Begin by writing down a broad topic that interests you. This serves as the foundation for your research.
 - **Example:**
 - The History of Nursing

2. Generate Subcategories

- Next, create subcategories or specific areas within your broad topic. Free write a list of more focused subtopics you would like to explore.
- Consider: Why this topic matters to you? Why should your audience care? What is something specific about the broad topic that is relevant today?
 - **Examples:**
 - The role of Florence Nightingale in establishing modern nursing practices.
 - The evolution of nursing education from the 19th century to the present.
 - The impact of World War I and II on the nursing profession and the development of nursing roles.

3. Gather Background Information

- Conduct preliminary research to gain a deeper understanding of your subtopic.
- This may involve reading articles, books, or credible websites. Utilize the APSU Woodward Library's free online databases for reliable resources. <https://library.apsu.edu/>

4. Formulate Research Questions

- Once you have narrowed your topic, generate a list of questions related to your subtopics.
- Consider: Which aspects would most interest your audience? How do these aspects relate to current events?
 - **Examples:**
 - How did Florence Nightingale's contributions to nursing reshape healthcare practices in the 19th century?
 - What significant changes have occurred in nursing education throughout history, and how have they influenced the profession?
 - In what ways did World War I and II expand the roles and responsibilities of nurses, and what lasting effects did this have on the profession?

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5. Select the Most Interesting Topic

- Review your list of potential research questions and choose the one that interests you the most and fits your assignment requirements.

6. Consider Key Aspects for Your Research

- As you refine your research question, keep the following questions in mind:
 - What theoretical framework or viewpoint will I use to examine my topic?
 - How can I break my broad topic down into smaller, manageable parts?
 - What methods will I use to gather information, and which sources will be most useful for my research?
 - How do different perspectives relate to my topic, and how can they enhance my understanding of it?
 - What specific time period, group, place, or phenomenon should I focus on to make my research more manageable?
 - Am I avoiding narrowing my topic too much?

7. Evaluate your Research Question

- What aspects about the more general topic can I expand on?
- Is my research question clear and focused?
- Does my research question have a simple yes or no answer? How can I avoid this to create a deeper analysis?
- Why does my research question matter, and how might others challenge the argument?

8. Explore Possible Answers

- With your focused research question, begin exploring possible answers and solutions through further research and analysis.

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References

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