

Video Transcript

Develop & Refine Your Research Topic

Introduction

Do you want to start a research project with a big idea, but realize you are unsure about how to begin? Starting with a big, bold topic can feel exciting, but it can also be overwhelming. That's why refining and narrowing your topic early is so helpful.

Why Narrow Your Topic

Refining early ensures your topic is:

- manageable, so it falls within the scope of your assignment or project,
- arguable with sufficient useful evidence,
- and clear, which helps guide the direction of your research from the start.

Step One: Choose a Broad Topic

In this video, we'll go through three simple steps to help you develop and refine your research topic. Let's look at each of them in depth, starting with step 1.

Start with a broad topic you're interested in. This could come from class content such as past lectures, readings, and previous assignments, or even past work experiences that you found interesting. You can also choose a topic by following your interests, research tends to be more engaging when it connects to something you care about.

Lastly, you can get inspiration from other scholars and researchers! Watch conferences or read some articles and try to identify gaps or emerging issues that need more research attention.

In general, ask yourself what the research is for, and are there any experiences, or interests that you want to build on and learn more about.

For example, if you are interested in art and taking a management course, your broad topic could be art company management.

Step Two: Explore the Topic

The next step is the exploration phase. Here, you can spend some time looking at different sources. This will let you understand your topic more.

You could look through popular sources such as news articles, general websites, AI tools, or even social media for background information. Scholarly sources like textbooks and peer-reviewed journals can provide helpful and reliable academic insights. Also, Wikipedia, encyclopedias and research starters are great for quick overviews.

Remember, this is just to help you understand the topic better, you don't need to find perfect sources for your research just yet.

Let's continue with the art company management example. After my exploration phase, I found out so much more about the topic. I learned there are so many different types of art companies, common strategic problems, and how modern technology is a growing concern for many of these companies.

Step Three: Narrow the Topic (50 seconds)

Now, it's time to refine your topic. There are different ways to do this, but we will use the 5 W's + H approach.

- First, think about **who** is involved or affected. Did you notice specific people, groups, communities, or organizations connected to the broad topic?
- Next, consider **where** it takes place. This could be a geographic location such as a city, country, or region. It could also be virtual environments.
- Then, look at **when** the topic is most relevant. Consider if there is a specific century, decade, or major event that you want to focus on.
- The '**what**' helps you identify subtopics or specific aspects you found during step 2 that interest you.
- The **why** is about significance. Why does this topic matter to you or others?
- Lastly, **how** is the issue happening? And for other topics, it might be how solutions address it.

This strategy is to help you organize your thoughts, and you may not need every element for your topic. Once you decide which elements are most relevant, use your answers to make a clear, concise research topic sentence.

Example

Let's continue with the art company example and use the information I learned earlier to help answer each question. These answers reflect my interests and aren't the only possible answers for this topic. For example, I will focus on a post-pandemic time-period, but other timeframes are valid too.

After reviewing my answers, I highlighted the elements I want to keep, like focusing on senior leaders rather than all staff. I then pulled these together into a clear research topic. Compared to my original broad topic, this is much more focused.

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It often takes a few tries to shape a neat, clear sentence, but narrowing down helps guide the next steps of your research. Remember that your topic may change, so stay flexible. example, if I can't find enough on Toronto galleries, I might change it to Canada.

With a narrowed topic, I can already see the direction of my project. For example, I might

Now, with my narrowed topic, I can see my research direction better. For example, I can start by explaining strategic management with a scholarly article, then show how art galleries apply it with a case study.

Conclusion

Refining your topic is a crucial first step in the research process. With your focus narrowed and your ideas clarified, you're ready to take the next step: developing a clear, targeted research question. To guide you through this and other key stages of the research process, explore our videos and resources designed to help you research with confidence.