

## 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](http://www.wilmu.edu/library)**

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### Selecting a Research Topic



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# 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](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/College <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.

