

# How to Write a Research Paper: Picking a Topic

## What is the first step in writing your paper?

### Establish Your Topic

1. Try to pick a topic that's fun and interesting. If your topic genuinely interests you, chances are you'll enjoy spending time working on it and it won't seem like a chore.
2. Finding a topic can be difficult. Give yourself plenty of time to read and think about what you'd like to do. Trying to answer questions you have about a particular subject may lead you to a good paper idea.
  - What subject(s) are you interested in?
  - What interests you most about a particular subject?
  - Is there anything you wonder about or are puzzled about with regard to that subject?
3. Once you have a topic, you will probably need to narrow it down to something more manageable. For example, say you are assigned to write a 10-page paper, and you decide to do it on Ancient Egypt. However, since Ancient Egypt is a big topic, and you only have a limited number of pages, you will have to focus on something more specific that has to do with that topic.

**Too general:**

*Ancient Egypt.*

Revised:

*The building of the pyramids of Ancient Egypt.*

4. One method for coming up with a more specific focus is called **brainstorming** (or **freewriting**). Brainstorming is a useful way to let ideas you didn't know you had come to the surface.
  - Sit down with a pencil and paper, or at your computer, and write whatever comes into your head about your topic.

- Keep writing for a short but specific amount of time, say 3–5 minutes. Don't stop to change what you've written or to correct spelling or grammar errors.
- After a few minutes, read through what you've written. You will probably throw out most of it, but some of what you've written may give you an idea that can be developed.
- Do some more brainstorming and see what else you can come up with.

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