

Santa Ana College Nealley Library Pathfinder

- **Start early.** Give yourself time to digest the various sources, to confer with your instructor, and revise your draft. This strategy also insures that you are not competing with other students for the same books.
- **Think about what you are reading and *outline* an argument that reflects the conclusions you want to draw.**
- **Flesh out the argument.**
- **Break large topics into smaller, more manageable ones.**
- **Write mainly in your own words. Always write your papers from scratch, starting with a blank screen.**
- **Do the citation work at the time of writing instead of leaving it for the end.**
- **Use *The Citation Machine* at <http://citationmachine.net>.**
- **Ask a Librarian for assistance.** Librarians are expert researchers who can *save you time*. Don't hesitate to ask at the Reference Desk.
- **Try to enjoy the process of learning, researching, and writing.** 11/2005 MEB

CHOOSING A TOPIC

Where can you get ideas?

- **Start with yourself.** Choose a topic that interests you and that you know something about, keeping in mind the amount of time you have available for research.
- **Browse through periodicals.** Current issues of newspapers, magazines, and journals can lead you to research topics or you can use an online newspaper such as www.cnn.com.
- **What have you talked about in class and what is covered in the text?** Sometimes ideas are as close as your notebook
- **Browse the library's bookshelves.** Books are shelved by topic so once you have a call number you can probably find related material by visiting the shelves.
- **Look at general and specialized encyclopedias in the Reference Collection and online.** For instance, the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (Ref B41 E3) discusses many topics like animal experimentation or organ donation. For online sources go to the library homepage and choose *Subject Guides*, then *Encyclopedias*.

- **Consider the requirements of the assignment.** For instance, if you are required to include scholarly journals in your research stay away from topics like *paparazzi* which are not well covered in scholarly literature.
- **Look at books and websites about term paper ideas.**

100 Research Topic Guides for Students (Ref. Station LB2369 B73.)

10,000 Ideas for Term Papers, Projects, Reports and Speeches (Ref. Station LB2369 L35.)

www.researchpaper.com

Subject Guide for Hot Topic Supersites

<http://infodome.sdsu.edu/research/guides/hot/supersites.shtml>

Research Guide on Paper Topics

www.csulb.edu/library/subj/Paper%20topics/hottopics/hottopicsindex.htm

General Paper Topics

www.isu.edu/library/research/topics.htm

Research Help: speech and term paper topics

<http://lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/help/speech/spechttopics.html>

Hot Paper Topics

<http://library/sau.edu/bestinfo/HOT/hotindex.htm>

Issues and Controversies

www.2facts.com/icof/issues-home-feature.asp

What are your information needs?

Answer these questions to determine the type, quantity, and depth of information you need.

- Do you need to concentrate on a certain geographical area?
- How current must the information be?
- How much information is required?
- What types of information are required? For instance, does the assignment mandate books, magazines, and scholarly journals?
- How much time do you have?
- What grade do you want to get?

Getting Started

- **State your topic in the form of a question.**

For instance, if you are interested in researching the media's role in perpetuating eating disorders state it as a question.

Does the media's unrealistic portrayal of body image contribute to eating disorders?

- **Identify the keywords or concepts associated with the topic:**

Eating disorders

Body image

Media or Advertising

- **Focus or narrow your topic**

Your topic should not be so broad that you are overwhelmed or so narrow that you are underwhelmed. Try to answer the five questions reporters ask: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?