

Topic Development for Research Papers

Getting started

- this worksheet will help you choose a topic, develop the topic, and write your research question

1. Start by reading your assignment to determine:

1. Due date
2. Context of your topic to the assignment
3. Scope of assignment - how much you are assigned to write may affect your topic selection. For example, if you only are required to write a one-page essay vs. a 1,000-word paper

2. Explore library reference sources (online subject encyclopedias or reference works) to look at the big picture and explore ideas for topics and questions you have about a subject

1. [Gale Ebooks](#) - an online encyclopedia with great background information
2. [Gale in Context: Opposing Viewpoints](#) - select "Browse" to find a list of topics based on current news events
3. [CQ Researcher](#) - find social and political topics

3. Try using the Topic Questions exercise below as you explore the 3 library reference sources listed in #2:

Topic Questions Exercise

1. Topic identification: What topic are you most interested in researching for your project?

Example: doctor shortages, standardized testing, texting while driving

Your topic:

2. Possible areas of focus: It is important to explore different aspects of your topic so you have a better idea of what you want to focus on in your paper. One of these focus areas may become the main topic for your research paper, while others may become sub-points.

Explore your topic in [Gale eBooks](#), [Gale in Context: Opposing Viewpoints](#) or [CQ Researcher](#), (see links above) and- based on what you find, list 3-4 different areas of focus for your topic that you are interested in.

*Example: what regions are most affected by doctor shortages and why, **should nurse practitioners or physician's assistants fill the gap**, do local medical schools make a difference?*

Your 3-4 areas of focus:

1.

2.

3.

3. Argument and position: For your research paper, you may need to take a stance or position about your topic, so it is important to make sure that your topic is arguable. Take the

area of focus you identified in Question 2 that you are most interested in. Can you find two different positions on it (one for, and one against)? What are they?

PRO: Nurse practitioners are good alternatives to doctors and can help relieve doctor shortages

CON: Nurse practitioners are not the same as doctors and cannot relieve doctor shortages.

Two positions on your favorite area of focus:

PRO:

CON:

4. Information needed: In order to support your position, you will need to provide evidence that your claim is valid. Choose your favorite position that you identified in Question 3. What information do you need to support your position?

Example: statistics about doctor shortages, definitions of nurse practitioners

Adapted from a topic development handout by UNLV Libraries, updated 2020 by Courtney Mlinar