

## Overview for Developing a Research Topic

Creating a research topic for an essay is manageable with a few key steps:

1. First, think about what interests you and review your course materials to find a broad topic.
2. Do some preliminary research to see what's already out there.
3. Narrow your focus to something specific and manageable.
4. Come up with clear research questions and make sure you have the resources you need.
5. Get feedback from peers, tutors, or instructors to refine your topic and make sure it fits the assignment guidelines.

This approach can help you find a focused and engaging research topic.

## Selecting a Topic



### Your Interests

Consider what subjects or issues genuinely intrigue you. Reflect on what you enjoy reading about or discussing.



### The Course

Sometimes an instructor will provide you a list of topics, or you can ask. You can also draw on course topics you've discussed in class.



### Library

Use the MSJC Library databases (try Opposing Viewpoints, Issues and Controversies, or CQ Researcher).



### Stirs Curiosity

Is there a topic you want to know more about? Use this as an opportunity to learn more about it.



### Other Courses

Draw on topics you've explored in other courses.



### Current Events

Listen to conversations happening in your communities.

### Making Your Topic Manageable

Selecting a topic that is too narrow or too broad will make your writing process more challenging than necessary. If your topic is too narrow, finding sources and developing ideas will be difficult. Conversely, a topic that is too broad can be overwhelming, leading to a shallow and unfocused argument due to the vast amount of information to consider. To ensure your topic is balanced, here are some ways to refine it:

- choose a specific perspective or lens
- focus on a case study or specific incident
- identify relationships
- specify a subtopic
- focus on a specific population
- limit by geography
- define by a time period



### Examples

#### Lens or Perspective:

- Broad: Immigration
- Refined: the mental health impacts of legal uncertainties for DACA students

#### Case Study or Specific Incident:

- Broad: Climate change
- Refined: the impact of extreme heat waves on agricultural workers in Riverside County

#### Relationships:

- Broad: Artificial Intelligence
- Refined: the relationship between AI-automation and job displacement in manufacturing

#### Subtopic:

- Broad: criminal justice system
- Refined: bias in the US criminal justice system

#### Specific Population:

- Broad: pollution
- Refined: the impact of air pollution on respiratory health among children living in urban areas

#### Geography:

- Broad: mental health
- Refined: mental healthcare access in Riverside County

#### Time Period:

- Broad: social media
- Refined: the evolution of privacy concerns on social media since 2010

## Generate Research Questions

After doing some **preliminary research** to better understand the **history, current context**, and **various perspectives** on the topic, you're ready to generate research questions. This is crucial for several reasons:

1. Guides Research: Directs focus to relevant information, saving time.
2. Clarifies Purpose: Defines what you are investigating and why, ensuring focused writing.
3. Shapes Argument: Forms the foundation for a specific, debatable thesis.
4. Organizes Writing: Provides a framework, ensuring logical structure and coherence.
5. Maintains Focus: Keeps the essay on track, preventing digression.
6. Enhances Critical Thinking: Encourages identifying knowledge gaps and considering different perspectives.

## Examples

**Refined Topic:** The mental health impacts of legal uncertainties for DACA students

**Research Questions:**

- How do legal uncertainties surrounding DACA affect the mental health of DACA students?
- What specific mental health challenges are most prevalent among DACA students facing legal uncertainties?
- How do DACA students cope with the stress and anxiety related to their legal status?
- What support systems are available to DACA students dealing with mental health issues, and how effective are they?

**Refined Topic:** Bias in the US criminal justice system

**Research Questions:**

- How does racial bias manifest in different stages of the US criminal justice system, from arrest to sentencing?
- How effective are current training programs and policy reforms in reducing bias within the US criminal justice system?
- What impact does media coverage have on public awareness and attitudes towards bias in the US criminal justice system?