Refine Your Topic

A common mistake that many people make in the beginning of research is to pick a topic, no matter how broad or narrow, and immediately try and find all the information they can about the topic.

A better way to start would be to refine your topic and turn it into a question that would be worth answering or a problem worth solving (may require preliminary research). Once you have done that, you will be in a position to find the specific information that you need, rather than be overwhelmed with information that is not relevant to you.

The following template can help you refine your topic.

1. **Topic: what you are writing about- I am working on the topic of:**

   _____

2. **Indirect Question: what you want to know about the topic- because I want to know who/ what/ when/ where/ why/ if:**

   _____

3. **Significance: why you want your reader (or yourself) to know and care about the topic- in order to help my reader better understand:**

   _____

HINT: If you are having trouble moving from one stage to the next, keep asking yourself "WHY?" until you find your answer.

Sometimes, you may not be able to answer the third question until you have completed a little bit of preliminary research, and/ or have completed your first draft.

Take a look at these examples:

1. Topic: I am studying "climate change" Why?

2. Indirect Question: because I want to know how "global warming could impact Tennessee" Why?

3. Significance: in order to "know how to prepare for flooding"

OR

1. Topic: I am researching "social media" Why?

2. Indirect Question: because I want to know what "Twitter does with user data" Why?

3. Significance: in order to "find the best ways to safeguard privacy when online"

Refine Your Topic Worksheet

If you have trouble moving from one stage to the next, **keep asking yourself "WHY?" until you find your answer.**

The third stage may not be answered until you help completed some research and/ or have your first draft.

I am working on the topic of:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Because I want to know who/ what/ when/ where/ why/ if:

_____

_____

_____

_____

In order to help my reader (or myself) better understand:

_____

_____

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