

Choosing A Topic For Your Extended Research Project

This semester in ENG 102, your research and writing will focus on a topic of your choice. You'll want to take time to choose a topic that will keep your interest and that will turn up credible and useful source material.

The topic needs to be one that is **ongoing or timely** (something that people continue to discuss and/or that has a strong connection to current events and concerns); since ENG102 focuses on developing academic research and writing skills, your topic also needs to be one for which you can find **credible, peer-reviewed sources**. Finally, the topic needs to be **focused/narrow** enough that you can complete your research and write about it within the time allotted for our class.

Topics to Avoid

There are some topics I want you to steer clear of: death penalty, gun control/gun rights, lowering the drinking age, abortion, and drug legalization. These topics are hot-button issues that create polarizing arguments where people on different sides don't really listen to one another—this makes it hard to write about them fairly and even harder to find suitable sources (so much of what's out there is a big hate-fest). Further, they are very broad issues that would take a tremendous amount of research and many pages of writing to address adequately.

Brainstorming and Proposing a Topic

To help you to choose a topic and to make sure it meets the project criteria, we will brainstorm several possible topics, which you will then bring to the library research session (**Thursday's class: LIB 319; Friday's class LIB 204D**). During this session, you'll become familiar with several useful research techniques and tools that will not just help you to find sources, but also to narrow and refine your topic. I ask you to **bring in several possible topics** so that if you find that one idea doesn't have enough credible sources related, you can switch to another.

After the library session, I want you to write a formal topic proposal explaining your choice, including why it is important/interesting to you, why it is worthy of research, who else it may be important to, and briefly overviewing what source material is available, among other things. I will give you an assignment sheet with more details at the end of the library session.

We'll start the brainstorming in class. Your finished notes will constitute a short writing assignment and is **due before the start of the library session** (post it to your private Google drive).

Brainstorming Possible Topics

(guided in-class activity)

First, list out several topics you are interested in. Choose topics that you want to learn more about. Local issues make good topics too—issues important to your hometown, to Richmond, to ECU, to your future profession. Remember, as you choose your topic, you don't need to have an argument in mind—instead, have questions, things that you want to find out about and be able to answer.

Choose your top three or four. Think of ways each of these topics connect to other issues: how might a local topic relate to larger national or global concerns; how might a global concern have a regional or local impact?

For your original topic ideas and for the new related topics you've generated, who are possible stakeholders—people who are some way affected by this issue? Who are possible audiences who might be interested in learning more about this topic?

What kinds of information will each audience find most credible, informative, and/or convincing? What will they want to know about the topic?

Look at your topics, and identify what kinds of information/evidence/sources you'd need to be able to engage the topic productively. What do you need to educate yourself about?

Examples of Past Projects

If you're having trouble thinking about topics, here are some examples of topics students wrote about in my most recent ENG102 class:

- What are therapy dogs, how are they certified, and is ECU's policy on service animals adequate for including them?
- How do employers view online MBA programs in comparison to face-to-face programs?
- What defines art and are video games art?
- What can be done about cyber-bullying at my middle and high school?
- PTSD is a recognized problem among many veterans, and treatment is improving for them—but how is it handled within the civilian population?
- What are effective "green" construction techniques for the Kentucky area?
- Education research shows the benefits of inclusive education—but my county's schools are not up to standard. What benefits would inclusive education bring to my county and what changes would have to be made to put it into place?