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If your assignment does not specify a topic, you'll need to select one. Choose a topic that interests you, not just one that you think will please your audience.

### **Where to Get Ideas:**

- Professor – discuss ideas with your instructor.
- [Ask A Librarian](#) for help choosing a topic.
- Personal interests or conversations with friends can generate ideas.
- Current events – magazines, newspapers, websites, and journals may help you discover timely topics.
- Reference sources – specialized encyclopedias or dictionaries can provide background information and help you think of a topic.
- Browsing the library shelves can also help you identify topics of interest. Books in Monroe Library are organized by topic, and so once you identify the call number of a relevant book you can browse for related books.

### **Information Needs:**

Consider the assignment carefully to determine how much and what type of information you need to complete the assignment. As you organize your research, think about

- type of assignment – Is it a five minute presentation or a fifty page essay?
- quantity of information needed – Do you need one article or several books?
- currency of information – Does it matter if the information was published a month ago or one hundred years ago?
- sources of information – Do you want newspaper articles, encyclopedia entries, journal articles, books, diaries, letters, etc? Sometimes certain sources are required; read your assignment carefully.
- format of information – Do you need a certain format – visual, audio, print, electronic?
- point of view, opinion – Does the assignment require a certain point of view? Multiple opinions?
- time available – How long do you have to complete your research?

### **Test Your Topic:**

Search for keywords that describe your topic in the [library catalog](#), [databases](#), or appropriate background sources. If you find too little information, you may need to broaden your topic. If you find too much information, consider narrowing your topic.

### **Broadening or Narrowing Your Topic:**

#### **Ways to broaden your topic:**

- shift focus – instead of genetically altered soybeans, try bioengineered or genetically altered food
- shift geographic concentration – instead of Louisiana, consider United States or North America
- broaden population – instead of Rosa Parks, try women in civil rights movement
- shift aspect – instead of asking whether organic foods are better, try doing research on the issues surrounding food labeling regulations

#### **Ways to narrow your topic:**

- time period – instead of infant mortality, try infant mortality rates in colonial America
- geography – instead of frogs, try frogs found in South America
- population – instead of home ownership, try African-American home ownership
- aspect or angle – consider a specific aspect of the topic, such as historical, psychological, or economic

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If you have questions about choosing a topic or research in general,  
[Ask A Librarian](#)



[Library home](#)