

Finding a Research Topic

- 1) What does and does not interest each of us is the result of a combination of different factors.
- 2) The best way to find an interesting and important research topic is to be prepared to consider a wide range of options.
 - a) Be open to new ideas and problems rather than simply reprocessing well-developed research topics.
 - b) Another reason to use multiple strategies for finding a topic is time urgency.
- 3) Finding a research topic can be broken down into two stages.
 - a) Search strategies (identifying the general area in which you want to do research).
 - b) Narrowing and refining the topic.
- 4) Four general categories of search strategies.
 - a) Personal
 - b) Interpersonal
 - c) Printed sources.
 - d) Computer resources.

Search Strategies

- 1) Personal Strategies.
 - a) Personal experience and observation are sources of general research topics that are readily accessible to everyone.
 - b) Personal observation can lead to new insights as well.
 - c) Brainstorming is helpful for finding a research topic when an assignment is very broad or when other strategies are not working.
 - i) Write down all topics that come to mind.
 - ii) Get a substantial list before you allow yourself to eliminate an idea.
 - (1) Eliminate all ideas that are implausible or cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of the research at hand.
 - (2) When you are satisfied with your list, examine the feasibility of each idea for the assignment, the availability of research in the area, and your motivation to stick with each topic.
- 2) Interpersonal Strategies
 - a) Interviewing professors.
 - b) Research assistants.
 - c) Other researchers.
 - d) Conferences/networking.
- 3) Printed Sources.
 - a) Primary journals.
 - b) Secondary sources.
 - i) Materials that summarize primary source materials for dissemination to other readers.
 - ii) One example is a textbook.
 - (1) Especially helpful if you don't know much about the subject.
 - (2) Peruse the table of contents.
 - (3) Then look for topics of interest.
 - c) Theses and dissertations are useful for finding ideas.

- i) Especially helpful to students who are in the process of determining a research topic for a thesis or dissertation or some other type of research.
 - ii) These contain a literature review chapter that contains useful ideas for future research.
 - iii) Can search the *Dissertations Abstracts International*, which is a serial abstracting many of the dissertations completed in the United States annually.
- 4) Computer Strategies.
 - a) Referring to computer databases that can be researched for various topics by entering particular key words.
 - b) Mainstream databases.
 - i) PsycLIT—to identify a research topic in psychology.
 - ii) ERIC—educational journals.
 - iii) MedLine—medical and health sciences journals.
 - iv) Sociological Abstracts—sociology journals.
 - v) Social Science Citation Index (SSCI)—instead of indexing specific articles, the SSCI indexes the citations of specific articles.
 - c) The Internet.
 - i) If interested in ethnic identity among Asian Americans, one could log onto the Soc.Culture.Asian American newsgroup and find out about some of the issues facing Asian American youths and young adults.
 - ii) The worldwide web (www).
 - (1) Browse through recent issues of the *Internet World* magazine, which is available in most public and university libraries.

Narrowing and Refining the Topic

- 1) Stages.
 - a) The first stage of finding a research topic is in identifying a general topic area.
 - b) Once you have found a general topic area of interest, the next stage is to narrow and refine the topic.
 - i) A useful way to narrow your topic is to develop a research question from your general topic.
 - ii) Use the same research strategies to help you narrow and refine your topic into a research question.
 - c) The next step is to formulate one or more hypotheses from your research question.

Conducting a Literature Search

- 1) Scopes of literature reviews.
 - a) Exhaustive: find all the literature that bears on your topic.
 - b) Non-exhaustive: limited.
 - i) You may be only interested in literature published during a certain time period.
 - ii) Or only in certain types of documents.
- 2) Topic and search specificity.
 - a) The more specific or narrow your topic, the less literature you will find on the topic.
 - i) If the topic is too narrow, you may not find anything that is relevant.

- ii) If it is too wide, you will be overwhelmed.
- b) If you define your topic narrowly and specifically, chances are that you will be able to conduct an exhaustive search without a great deal of difficulty.
 - i) It is difficult to define a topic specifically before you head to the library.
 - ii) Most of us need to read about the topic generally before we can focus on the specific issue.