DEVELOP AND NARROW A TOPIC

A well-written paper depends on a strong topic that is focused and specific. To get there, you need to develop some topic ideas, choose the best one, and narrow that topic further.

Developing A Topic

Researching your subject, brainstorming ideas, and sharing your ideas with others are three steps that can help you develop a strong topic.

Do your research

Doing preliminary research will help you to discover what people who work on the topic are interested in or concerned about.

Brainstorm

There are countless ways to brainstorm ideas for a topic; below are three common approaches.

- **Freewriting**: Jot down ideas without revising or proofreading
- **Questioning**: Write down questions you have about your topic without revising or proofreading
- **Mapping**: Starting with a main topic, write down subtopics that come to mind, drawing links that show how the different subtopics relate.

Talk about your ideas

Talking to others helps you to understand your ideas from a reader’s perspective. It can help you refine the topic or even move in a new direction.
Narrowing Your Topic

Narrowing your topic makes your work more manageable and your paper more likely to succeed. A good paper takes a smaller portion of a larger issue or problem and investigates that part in depth. Narrowing your topic allows you to choose a problem that is specific enough to research with vigour. Below is an example of the process:

1. **Bicycles**
   - Municipal policies and bicycle use

**Move from abstract to concrete**

A manageable topic is concrete. As we narrow the scope of a topic, the subject matter moves from abstract concepts to ideas that are more precise. Let’s use bicycles, again, as our example.

Although bicycles are concrete “things,” the word bicycles could mean different things to different people. These ideas, such as design, bicycle culture, or infrastructure, are subtopics of “bicycles.”
Add specific details

As you narrow in on one subtopic, the number of subtopics decreases:

Is it narrow enough?

In our last example, notice that when you begin to narrow a large topic, the initial subtopics that come up are still broad, general ideas. The more you narrow, the more specific your descriptions become. You can use the traditional journalistic questions (Who, What, Where, When, Why) to help you move towards more specific topics: