

Choosing a Research Topic

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Consider Narrowing a Broad Topic

One way to narrow a broad topic such as "the environment" is to put limits on it. Common ways to limit a topic include:

- **By geographic region:** For example, "What environmental issues are most important in the Southwestern United States?"
- **By culture:** For example, "How does the environment fit into the Navajo worldview?"
- **By time frame:** For example, "What are the most prominent environmental issues of the last 10 years?"
- **By discipline:** For example, "How does environmental awareness affect business practices today?"
- **By population group:** For example, "What are the effects of air pollution on senior citizens?"
- **By specific issue:** For example, "How does pesticide run-off affect wetlands?" "Should curbside recycling be mandatory in Everett?"

Consider Widening a Narrow Topic

Your topic may be harder to research if it is too narrow. Make sure you have sufficient resources at hand before choosing a subject that is:

- **Locally confined:** A topic such as, "What are sources of noise pollution in Tucson?" might only be covered in local newspapers, if at all.
- **Recent:** A topic such as "What are the president's latest concerns about Iraq?" won't be covered in books and journal articles, but it will be covered in newspaper and magazine articles. Web sites may or may not be available.
- **Broadly interdisciplinary:** If you choose a topic such as, "How can the environment contribute to the culture, politics and society of the Western states?" you may be overwhelmed with superficial information.
- **Popular:** You may find only popular media articles on topics about subjects such as sports figures, rock music and rap stars; for example, a topic such as, "How has Puff Daddy/P Diddy influenced the music of Eminem?"