



Developing a Topic

How Do I... Undergraduate Research Guides

Part of the "Start My Research Series"

Learn How to:

- Describe your topic.
- Ask appropriate questions.
- Identify keywords.
- Locate subject areas for your topic.
- Find an example of concept map
- Find other helpful guides like this one!

Formulating your topic prior to beginning your search can be a good time saver. Following a process like the one suggested below will jumpstart your thinking about your topic and provide you with varying terminology, keywords, and perspectives that will save you time and lead to better results as you begin to search for information.

Four Fool-Proof Steps:

Step # 1: Describe your topic.

- Briefly describe your topic and what you hope to write about in your research paper.
- The paper proposal that you turn in to your instructor can serve as a description of your topic.

Example: My paper will discuss the ethical issues associated with the medical use of marijuana.

Step # 2: Discover questions you need to answer as you begin your research?

- List questions that are important to your research about this topic.
- Identify the main words and concepts in each question. These will be your keywords.
- List these words or place them in a concept map (See http://www.library.uiuc.edu/ugl/howdoi/concept_map.html for an example.)

Example: Should the MEDICAL use of MARIJUANA be LEGALIZED?



Research is an **inquiry process**. Questions play an important role in inquiry!

Need More Help? Ask a Librarian!

Website:
www.library.uiuc.edu/ugl

Screen Name:
askundergrad

Fall and Spring Hours:
Open Sunday 10am-
Close Friday 10pm
(24 hours)
Saturday 10am-10pm

Reference Hours:
Sun-Thurs: 10am-Midnight
Friday & Saturday:
10am-10pm

Phone:
Reference: 217.333.8589
Info Services: 217.333.3477



Step # 3: Identify *alternative words and concepts for your keywords.*



Use reference sources to help you identify keywords, terminology, people, places, dates, and events associated with your topic.

- Ask for assistance in identifying good sources about your topic at the Research Desk. Different authors may use different terminology, so be prepared to use alternatives in your search.

- Make a list of other words (*synonyms*) that could be used in place of your keywords. Keep in mind that when different people write or talk about the same topic they may use different terminology.
- Think about terminology that is used by professionals in various disciplines who work with and write about your topic.
- Use a concept map to help you keep track of your keywords and alternative terminology.
- When you search for information using these keywords in varying combinations you will retrieve different sets of results.

Example:

Concept # 1: marijuana	Concept # 2: medical	Concept # 3: legalize
<u>Alternatives:</u> cannabis THC	<u>Alternatives:</u> therapeutic medicinal	<u>Alternatives:</u> laws legislation

Step # 4: Identify those subject areas where you are most likely to find articles about your topic.

- Think about who is likely to write and read about your topic. Will there be people from more than one discipline be interested?
- For example, is your topic of interest to scientists, sociologists, historians, health professionals, etc.?

Example:

Keyword/Concept	Subject Area
marijuana	chemistry, biology
medical	medicine
legalize	law, politics

Check out other How Do I... Guides in this series, Start My Research:

- Choosing a Topic
- Use Reference Sources
- Find Topic Ideas
- Creating a Concept Map



Information about the same topic retrieved from resources in different disciplines or subject areas will present you with different viewpoints on your topic, ultimately adding depth to your paper.