

Selecting Your Research Topic

To decide what to research, you can start by thinking about subjects and then consider specific topics. Some examples of subjects and topics are shown in the table below.

Subject	Topic
entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects of new devices • file sharing
health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doctor and/or nurse shortages • funding
post-secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entry requirements • graduate success
history of the West and North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relations between First Nations • immigration

It is important to take the time to consider several topics carefully before selecting a topic for your research project. Below is a list of criteria that will help you to determine if a topic you are considering is suitable.

Criteria for Selecting Your Research Topic

• Does the topic interest you?

You will be more successful if you choose a topic that interests you.

You will be more motivated to do the research, and you will be more attentive while doing the research. As well, you will care more about the conclusions you draw.

• Is the topic practical to research?

If you decide to use first-hand data, can you generate the data in the time available, with the resources you have? If you decide to use second-hand data, are there multiple sources of data? Are these sources reliable, and can you access them in a timely manner?

• Is there an important issue related to the topic?

Think about the issues related to the topic. If there are many viewpoints on an issue, you may be able to gather data that support some viewpoints but not others. The data you collect should enable you to come to a reasoned conclusion.

• Will your audience appreciate your presentation?

Your topic should be interesting to others in your class, so they will be attentive during your presentation. Avoid a topic that may offend anyone in your class.

PROJECT EXAMPLE

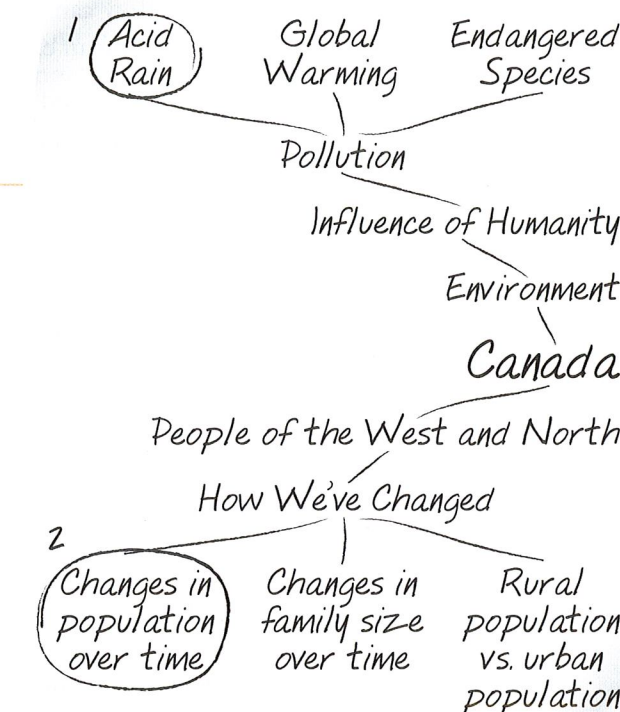
Choosing a topic

Sarah identified some subjects that interest her. Below she describes how she went from subjects to topics and then to one research topic.

Sarah's Research Topic

I identified five subjects that interested me and seemed to be worth exploring: health care, entertainment, post-secondary education, peoples of the West and North, and the environment. I used a mind map to organize my thoughts about each subject into topics. (Part of my mind map is shown here.) This gave me a list of possible topics to choose from.

I needed to narrow down my list by evaluating each topic. I wanted a topic that would be fun to research and might interest others in my class. I also wanted a topic that had lots of available data. Finally, I wanted a topic that involved an issue for a chance to come to a useful conclusion. I circled the two topics that seemed most likely to work. Then I did an initial search for information about these topics.



1. I spent some time researching the history of acid rain in Canada. I discovered that the problem was identified in the 1960s, but it has been a problem mostly in Eastern Canada. However, I did come across some newspaper articles and journal reports warning that acid rain may become a problem in the West. As I searched for data to support this claim, I found little historical data. I concluded that this topic would be too difficult to research.
2. I knew that the federal government conducts a census every four years to collect information about the people who live in Canada, so I was confident that I would be able to find lots of historical data. When I searched the Internet, I found several data sources for Canada's population. I feel that changes in the population of the West and North would make a good topic for my project.

Your Turn

- A. Choose several subjects that interest you. Then make a list of topics that are related to each subject. A graphic organizer, such as a concept web or mind map, is useful for organizing your thoughts.
- B. Once you have chosen several topics, do some research to see which topic would best support a project. Of these, choose the one that you think is the best. Refer to "Criteria for Selecting Your Research Topic."