

How to Find and Develop a Viable Research Topic

How to Find and Develop a Viable Research Topic

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY A TOPIC.

If you haven't picked a topic yet, go to [Suggestions for Finding a Topic](#).

State your topic idea as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?"

Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. In this case they are alcoholic beverages, health, and college students.

STEP TWO: TEST YOUR TOPIC.

Test the main concepts or keywords in your topic **by looking them up** in the appropriate background sources or **by using them as search terms** in the [Cornell Library Catalog](#) and in periodical indexes.

- If you are finding too much information and too many sources, narrow your topic by using the **and** operator: beer and health and college students, for example.
 - Finding too little information may indicate that you need to broaden your topic. For example, look for information on students, rather than college students. Link synonymous search terms with or: alcoholic beverages or beer or wine or liquor. Using truncation with search terms also broadens the search and increases the number of items you find.
-

Once you have identified and tested your topic, you're ready to take **the next step, [finding](#)**

background information on your research topic.

Revised 04 April 2006
Michael Engle

Source URL: <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/topic.html>