**Refining a Research Topic into a Question**

***Who, What Why, What Kind, When and So What?***

* **Who**: For example, at a company, there are founders, CEOs, and well-known innovators along with managers, suppliers, labour, retailers, and customers. **What** is interesting about these people or groups? **Why** are they important? Can you get even more specific? If you’re looking at customers, **what kind** of customers? Upscale shoppers or bargain hunters? New customers or repeat customers? Young or old?
* You could narrow your topic by focusing on a specific time period – **when**. Have there been important periods of change or growth or major impacts in your subject’s history? Is there something really big going on right now?
* **“So what?”** – You are looking for an area where people don’t agree – where there’s more than one side to the story. “So what?” challenges you to find a topic that really captures your attention – and your reader’s attention. If there is a question in your notes you can answer “so what?” that’s the one to pick.

***Examples of Limiting your Question***

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| **Limiter** | **Example** |
| **geographical area** | What environmental issues are most important in the Southwestern United States |
| **culture** | How does the environment fit into the Navajo world view? |
| **time frame** | What are the most prominent environmental issues of the last 10 years? |
| **discipline** | How does environmental awareness effect business practices today? |
| **population group** | What are the effects of air pollution on senior citizens? |

**Remember that a topic may be too difficult to research if it is too:**

* **locally confined** - Topics this specific may only be covered in these (local) newspapers, if at all. Example: What sources of pollution affect the Genesee County water supply?
* **recent** - If a topic is quite recent, books or journal articles may not be available, but newspaper or magazine articles may. Also, Web sites related to the topic may or may not be available.
* **broadly interdisciplinary** - You could be overwhelmed with superficial information. Example: How can the environment contribute to the culture, politics and society of the Western states?

***The Research Question***

The question should have two or more possible answers.  See some examples below:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broad Topic >** | **Narrowed Topic >** | **Focused Topic >** | **Research Question** |
| Women's health | Women & cancer | Women smokers & breast cancer | Is there a connection between cigarette smoking and breast cancer risk? |
| Computer games | Computer game violence | Computer game violence & children | How does violence in computer games affect children? |
| Eating disorders | Teens & eating disorders | Teen peer pressure & bulimia | What role, if any, does peer pressure play in the development of bulimia in teens? |

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