

Determining a Topic

Determining a topic for writing can sometimes be challenging, but **these** prewriting **methods** can result in a topic worthy of conversation.

- **Read the assignment closely:** Are you being asked to explain, argue, analyze, narrate, compare/contrast, observe, inform, etc.? Read your assignment sheet carefully and thoroughly, as you must understand the writing task that is being asked of you before you can even begin to consider potential topics.
- **Research/Read:** Skim through research sources and news reports; what is going on in the world that engages your interest? What ideas or concepts are contained in your textbook or other resources? What are some 'hot topic' concerns displayed via media? What are some conversations taking place on campus? What complaints have you heard about? What positive things are taking place on campus or in your classes? Consider how your responses to these questions are potential topics for your writing.
- **Converse with Others:** Talk to your classmates, teachers, mentors, family members, and so on. You do not necessarily have to talk to them about potential topics, but think about the conversations that you are having daily within your interactions with others. What are some significant topics of discussion? What topics of discussion are memorable? What incidents and/or situations have been discussed that you may have a strong opinion about? These topics could potentially prompt a very meaningful piece of writing.
- **Reflect on Questions:** Which topics have interested you in the past? Which topics discussed in class have intrigued you, angered you, or compelled you in some way? Which topics have challenged you? What do you already know about some of these topics, and what would you like to find out? What topic do you think is worthy of sharing with an audience?
- **Freewrite:** Write for 5-15 minutes without stopping. If your mind draws a blank or you can't think of anything to write, you can write a word or phrase repeatedly. Try not to censor yourself during your freewrite; write exactly what comes to your mind! Do not worry about grammar, mechanics, conventions, or being politically correct in this writing. Keep focused on writing down every idea that comes to mind. When you have completed your freewriting, what ideas or possible topics are on your page? Is there anything surprising in your writing, or a potential point of conversation that you had not considered yet? Use those ideas to spark another freewriting session or as material for a map or outline.
- **Map out ideas:** Create a visual representation of your thoughts using arrows, circles, stars, boxes, or any other graphic design to illustrate connections among your ideas and thoughts
- **Create Lists or Outlines:** Organize your thoughts and ideas by priority. Use different levels of bullets or numerals so that your outline functions as an organization model for your writing.

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Date: 8/21/18