



Narrowing down your topic

SchreibCenter at the Language Resource Center

Usually, any topic you find interesting is initially too broad for a term paper or thesis, e.g. “Migration in the European Union”, “Renewable energy”, or “Climate change and energy policies in the 21st century”. It is important that you narrow down your subject in order to find a proper structure for your thesis – not lose yourself in an enormous pile of literature.

The following categories can help you narrow down a topic.

Try to use as many as you can to formulate your topic *as precisely and appropriately as possible*:

- a) **time frame**, e.g. specific era, century, decade, from ... to, ...
- b) **(geographic or political) location**, e.g. country, city, region, ...
- c) **institution**, e.g. school, university, company, department, ...
- d) **group of people**, e.g. women, students, children, migrants, engineers, ...
- e) **sources**, e.g. children’s movies, advertisements, ...
- f) **important individuals or works**, e.g. Shakespeare’s plays, the philosophy of Kant, the relationship between C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, ...
- g) **scientific field**, e.g. neurolinguistics, experimental physics, microbiology, ...
- h) **specific theories and approaches within your chosen field**, e.g. quantum field theory, class theory, corporate finance theory, ...
- i) **most important researchers in the chosen field**, e.g. an analysis based on Freud’s findings, with the focus on the work of Max Weber, ...
- j) **individually chosen aspects**, e.g. focus on what can cause the issue you write about, or on the challenges resulting from it, ...

Based on:

SchreibCenter at TU Darmstadt: *Fragestellung & Themeneingrenzung*. [https://www.owl.tu-](https://www.owl.tu-darmstadt.de/media/owl/schreibtechniken_und_uebungen/Fragestellung_Thema-eingrenzen.pdf)

[darmstadt.de/media/owl/schreibtechniken_und_uebungen/Fragestellung_Thema-eingrenzen.pdf](https://www.owl.tu-darmstadt.de/media/owl/schreibtechniken_und_uebungen/Fragestellung_Thema-eingrenzen.pdf) (access: 24 May 2023).

ThesisHelpers.com: *Narrowing Down Research Topic: Ultimate Guide With Examples*. <https://www.thesishelpers.com/blog/narrowing-down-research-topic/> (access: 24 May 2023).

Ball, A. (2021): *How do I narrow down my research topic?* <https://seneca.libanswers.com/faq/195516> (access: 24 May 2023).

Exercise:

Narrow down any or all of the following subjects, using the categories listed above:

1. US foreign policy.
2. Social criticism in English literature.
3. Extracurricular education for adults.
4. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Possible answers:

1. US foreign policy:
 - ... during World War II (a)
 - ... in the Reagan era (a)
 - ... in Asia (a+b)
 - ... in print media (e)
 - ... – a system analysis (h)
 - Women and their role in US foreign policy (d)
2. Social criticism in English literature:
 - ... 1914-1918 (a)
 - ... in the works of Jane Austen (f)
 - ... – postcolonial analysis (f+h)
 - ... – child poverty in the works of Charles Dickens (f+h)
3. Extracurricular education for adults:
 - ... in Hesse since 2000 (a+b)
 - ... – managers of educational institutions and their subjective theories (d+h)
 - On-the-job training for teachers in extracurricular educational institutions (j)
4. The philosophy of Emmanuel Kant:
 - Emmanuel Kant and the Enlightenment (a+j)
 - Kant's philosophy between 1780 and 1790 (a)
 - The influence of David Humes on Kant's philosophy (f+j)

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[darmstadt.de/media/owl/schreibtechniken_und_uebungen/Fragestellung_Thema-eingrenzen.pdf](https://www.owl.tu-darmstadt.de/media/owl/schreibtechniken_und_uebungen/Fragestellung_Thema-eingrenzen.pdf) (access: 24 May 2023).

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