

Selecting a Research Topic

Selecting a Research Topic – Structured Study Notes

1. Why Choosing the Right Topic Matters

Benefit	Explanation
Relevance	Aligns your work with current scholarly debates, policy needs, or industry trends.
Motivation	A topic that interests you sustains momentum through setbacks.
Feasibility	Determines whether you can realistically complete the study within time, budget, and skill limits.
Impact	Increases chances of publication, funding, or practical application.

2. Core Criteria for a Good Research Topic

Criterion	What to Look For	Red Flag
Interest & Passion	You feel curious and excited to explore it.	“It’s just a requirement; I’m indifferent.”
Originality	Adds a new angle, fills a gap, or applies a method to a new context.	Replicates existing studies without justification.
Scope	Narrow enough for depth, broad enough for significance.	Too vague (“Education”) or too narrow (“Effect of blue ink on 3?year?old’s handwriting in a single classroom”).
Relevance	Connects to disciplinary debates, societal needs, or professional practice.	Obscure niche with no clear audience.
Data Availability	Sources, participants, or datasets are accessible.	Requires proprietary data you cannot obtain.
Methodological Fit	The topic can be addressed with methods you can learn or already know.	Requires specialized equipment you cannot access.
Ethical Viability	No insurmountable ethical barriers.	Involves vulnerable populations without clear safeguards.

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Funding & Resources	Potential to attract grants or institutional support.	No realistic funding path.

3. Step-by-Step Process

3.1 Brainstorming

1. **Free-write** – 10-15 min of nonstop ideas related to your discipline, courses, or work experience.
2. **Mind-map** – Place central themes in the middle; branch out sub-topics, questions, and possible variables.
3. **List Influences** – Recent papers, conferences, news items, policy briefs, or industry reports that sparked interest.

3.2 Preliminary Literature Scan

Action	Tools	Goal
Keyword search	Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, discipline-specific databases	Identify major theories, models, and gaps.
Citation chasing	Backward (references) & forward (citing papers)	Map the scholarly conversation.
Annotated bibliography (5-10 sources)	Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote	Summarize key findings, methods, and identified research gaps.

3.3 Gap Identification

- **Thematic gaps** – Topics not yet explored.
- **Methodological gaps** – Existing questions answered only with limited methods.
- **Population gaps** – Groups or settings under-studied.
- **Temporal gaps** – Recent developments lacking empirical evidence.

3.4 Feasibility Check

Question	How to Answer
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Do I have access to data?

Contact data custodians, explore open datasets, assess fieldwork logistics.

Can I complete it in the given timeframe?

Draft a rough timeline (literature ? design ? data collection ? analysis ? write?up).

Do I possess or can I acquire needed skills?

Identify required methods; plan training or collaboration.

Are there ethical hurdles?

Draft