

Selecting a Research Topic

Selecting a Research Topic – Study Guide

1. Why the Choice of Topic Matters

Benefit	How It Helps Your Project
Focus	Keeps the scope manageable and prevents “mission creep.”
Motivation	A topic you care about sustains effort over months or years.
Relevance	Aligns your work with current debates, funding opportunities, or professional goals.
Originality	Increases the chance of contributing new knowledge.

2. Initial Brainstorming Strategies

Technique	Steps	Tips
Mind Mapping	1. Write a broad area (e.g., “Renewable Energy”). 2. Branch out sub-areas, methods, populations, gaps.	Use colors to separate conceptual, methodological, and practical branches.
Question-Driven List	1. Ask “What if...?”, “Why does...?”, “How could...?” 2. Record every question that sparks curiosity.	No filtering at this stage—capture all possibilities.
Literature Scan	1. Search recent review articles or meta-analyses. 2. Note “Future Research” sections.	Prioritize topics with multiple “research needed” calls.
Stakeholder Talk	1. Discuss with supervisors, industry partners, or community groups. 2. Ask what problems need solving.	Real-world relevance often emerges here.

3. Criteria for a Viable Topic

Criterion	What to Look For	Red Flag
Interest & Passion	You can talk about it for hours.	You feel indifferent or bored.

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Criterion	What to Look For	Red Flag
Feasibility	Data sources are accessible; required skills are within reach or can be learned.	Data are proprietary, expensive, or ethically restricted.
Scope	Narrow enough for a dissertation/thesis, broad enough for a full paper.	Too broad (e.g., "Climate change") or too narrow (e.g., "Temperature of one specific lake on a single day").
Originality	Gaps identified in literature; potential for new theory or method.	Replicates existing studies without added value.
Relevance	Aligns with current policy, industry trends, or academic debates.	Topic is obsolete or of purely historical interest.
Ethical Viability	No major ethical barriers; IRB approval is realistic.	Involves vulnerable populations without clear safeguards.

4. Refining the Idea – From Broad Area to Precise Question

1. Identify the Core Concept

Example: "Social media use among adolescents."

2. Add a Dimension (population, setting, time, variable)

Example: "Social media use among adolescents in urban schools."

3. Specify the Relationship or Gap

Example: "Social media use and sleep quality among adolescents in urban schools."

4. Formulate a Working Research Question

Example: "How does daily time spent on Instagram affect sleep quality among 14?16?year?old students in urban high schools?"

Check the question against the criteria in Section 3.

5. Quick Feasibility Checklist (Before You Commit)

Item	Yes / No	Comments
Data Availability		Public datasets, school records, or willing participants?
Methodological Fit		Quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, mixed methods?
Time Frame		Can be completed