

Narrowing Your Topic

When you sit down to write, does your mind turn blank? If so, you're not alone. Many writers experience this at some time or another, but some writers have **strategies** or techniques to get them started.

First and foremost, if you don't care about your topic, neither will your audience.

Analyze the assignment

If you are assigned a topic such as *education*, it is too broad to cover in a 3 to 5-page paper that is due in a week or two. You need to find something you care about under that heading, a problem or issue that upsets you or makes you curious, or that you would like to "fix."

Explore a problem — not the topic!

1. **What are you interested in?** What do you care about?
2. What might you need to consider? You may have to look around a bit online, for example.

Begin by asking, "**So what?**"

- Who might care about this problem or issue besides you? Who might not care at all?
- Who is your intended audience?
- Who do you want to persuade—to do what? What would you want them to do? What is your purpose? What information might you need?
- Or who do you want to inform? Why?

For example, if your "problem" is food in the Student Center:

- Why should you write about this, and why should anyone other than JSU students care?
- Do you want to analyze large-scale institutional cooking? To inform?
- Do you want to compare JSU's food to that served at another university/restaurants off campus? To persuade?
- Do you want [your intended audience] to pity you because of the intolerable food you have to eat?

Start the ideas flowing

1. Brainstorm. Jot down everything that comes to mind, including material you are sure you will throw out. Ask friends, look around online. Be ready to keep adding to the list at odd moments as ideas continue to come to mind.
2. If you could talk to your audience, what questions would you ask them? What might they want to ask you? Try to find answers to those questions.
3. Take a rest and let it all percolate.
4. Tell it to someone: Summarize your idea in three or four sentences and get feedback.

Better yet – Come to the RWC 😊!