Choosing a topic……..hmmmmm….are you stumped? A topic is a general subject the author chooses to address. While this might seem to be a simple concept, choosing and narrowing down a topic appropriate to a particular assignment length or addressing a specific audience can prove to be challenging. Why? Because in choosing and narrowing down a topic, we must limit that topic to something that can be supported and/or proven within the restrictions of the assignment or project. Below are some tips to help you choose a topic for your research paper.

1. **Be sure that you understand the assignment.** If you have any questions, please ask your instructor.

2. **If the research paper is going to be Argumentative, you will need to pick a topic which can be justified with specific evidence.** In an argumentative paper, you are making a claim which may be based on opinion, a policy, an interpretation, or an evaluation. You are choosing a side to a particular issue and defending it with strong evidence that supports your claim.

3. **Make sure the topic is neither too broad nor too narrow and you can find sufficient resources for citation purposes.** Too broad of a paper can be confusing because of lack of focus in the paper. Too narrow a topic, may lead to rather dull reading because there is not a lot of room for discussion and inclusion of the pros and cons. Also if the topic is too narrow, you may have a difficult time finding enough references. In general, for research paper requirements, you need to have at least eight sources for citation purposes.

4. **Brainstorm topic ideas.** If you have trouble thinking up topics to write about (and most people do), start simple. Take out a piece of paper or open up a new word document on your computer, and start writing down whatever ideas come into your head. Here are some questions you might ask yourself:
   - What are you interested in? Remember it is much easier to write about something that interests you.
   - Do you feel strongly about some issues? What are they?
   - What are some areas of expertise or interest?
   - Do you have an interest in a particular area, and would you like to learn more about that topic?
   - What are the limitations of the assignment? Do you have to choose from a list provided by the instructor?
   - What are some issues or topics that are in the news right now that you find interesting and might be relative to the assignment?
   - Can your teacher, classmates, friends, or family members offer suggestions for topics that you find interesting and important?

5. **Evaluate your topic for ease and quality.** How difficult will this topic be to research? Is the topic relevant to the material you are studying and what are the assignment requirements? A more current topic might be harder to research because studies or reviews may not have been completed or done yet. Don’t let this stop you, if this is something that you have an interest in. Just be aware that finding appropriate citation may be more difficult. Before you make your final choice, you might want to do some library and computer research to find out how much information is available about your proposed topic.

6. **Narrow your topics to one or two choices.** If you have several topics and you cannot decide between them, think about the above issues. Consider the amount of time you have and where your real interests lie. After narrowing your choices to one or two consider; which topic complements your abilities, knowledge, available research
material, and interests?

7. **Choose one topic and write your outline.** Make your choice, start writing your outline and selecting your sources. This final step should help you decide if this topic will work for you. Many times clarity and affirmation come when we take the final step and start writing everything down.