



# Choose a Research Topic

1. **Select a topic that interests you**
2. **Read through background information**
3. **Start making a list of key words**
4. **Write out your topic as a statement and select the main concepts**
5. **Start making a list of words to describe your topic**

## **Select a topic that interests you:**

Selecting a topic is possibly the most difficult part of doing research. Is it too big? Is it too narrow? Will I be able to find enough on it? Start by choosing a topic that you like or are curious about. You're going to be working on it for quite a while, so try and find one that's interesting and that you can reasonably cover in the time and space available.

## **Read through background information:**

Taking a few minutes to read about your topic in a specialized encyclopedia, dictionary or handbook may be one of the most effective and time saving research tips on this list. You will probably refine and refocus your topic several times before you finalize it.

The Reference shelves behind our Reference Desks are filled with books that can help you focus your topic. These books are good places to start your research when you know little about a topic, when you need an overview of a subject, or when you want a quick summary of basic ideas. They are also useful for discovering the names of important people, and can familiarize you with the vocabulary of the field. Encyclopedia articles are often followed by carefully selected bibliographies or lists of references to other works, useful items to have as you begin looking for additional information.

## **Write out your topic as a statement and select the main concepts:**

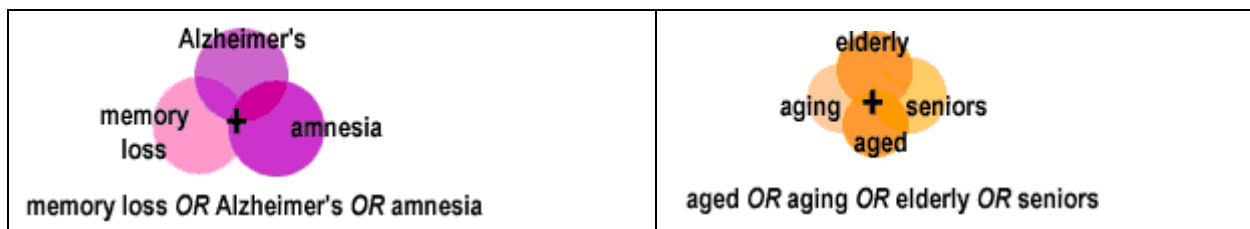
Once you have your topic, write it out as a short sentence or question and look at the different components that make up your statement. The research statement "*Is memory loss related to aging?*" has two main concepts:

- 1) memory loss
- 2) aging

## **Start making a list of words to describe your topic:**

Start compiling a list of the key words that you will use as you search for your topic. The way terms are used in some fields can be very different from standard everyday usage. The Reference Desk can help you find specialized dictionaries and thesauri to define unfamiliar terms and quickly build a useful list of key words to search on. For example, the topic "*Is memory loss related to aging?*" might have key words that fall into two general categories:

- 1) memory loss or amnesia or Alzheimer's.
- 2) aging or aged or elderly, seniors



Combine your concepts with their keywords to produce a final set that contains elements of both key concepts:

