

# San Diego Miramar College Library / LRC

## SELECTING A TOPIC FOR YOUR PAPER

- 1) **Pick a topic that interests you.** Choose something that you want to know more about or that will add to your own knowledge. If you are assigned a topic and have no choice, think of ways to make the topic as interesting as you can.
- 2) **Scan your textbook and/or other class materials** to determine what area is the most interesting to you. For writing classes where you may choose any subject, try scanning magazines, books, and newspapers, talking to your friends, and watching television. Look in the library's reference/ready reference collections for *100 Research Topic Guides for Students* (Z 710 .B73 1990); *10,000 Ideas for Term Papers, Projects, and Speeches* (Z 710 .L35 1998); and the *CQ Researcher* (JK 1 .E3) for other possible topics on current issues.
- 3) **Avoid topics that are too broad or too obscure.** You may need to limit or focus your topic in order to keep it manageable.
- 4) **Think of questions or issues that involve your topic.** Are there any conflicts, problems, and/or differing viewpoints concerning your topic.
- 5) **Always check your topic with your instructor.** (S)he will be able to suggest the best method of approaching your topic.
- 6) **As soon as possible after you choose your topic, go to the library.** Even if you don't plan to start writing immediately, you need to see how much information is available on your topic. Feel free to ask the reference librarian for help in finding information on your topic. The library may not have everything you need for your paper – in which case they will have to borrow from other sdccd libraries, which takes some time. Sometimes you may need to change your topic a little (or a lot) based on the information you find. If this happens, be sure to check your alterations with your instructor.

7) **Write the paper.** Your instructor may give you specific directions for the format or physical appearance of the paper. If not, the standard format usually consists of:

- A title page with the title of your paper, your name, the instructor's name, the class, and the date in that order.
- The text of the paper typed on one side only, double-spaced, with 1" margins all around, page numbers on each page, and every paragraph indented 5 spaces.
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- A bibliography (check with the instructor for the required format - MLA, APA, etc.)