In Context Toolbox – How to Choose a Topic

The **In Context Toolbox** tip sheets are designed to help middle school and high school researchers prepare a written report. This document will explain how to **choose a topic** for your report.

> Need more help with your report? Visit Help in any In Context resources for more **In Context Toolbox Tip Sheets**!

So, you have to write a report, but you don't have a topic yet. Don't worry, it's easy to pick an interesting topic. You just have to do two things:

- **Consider the assignment**
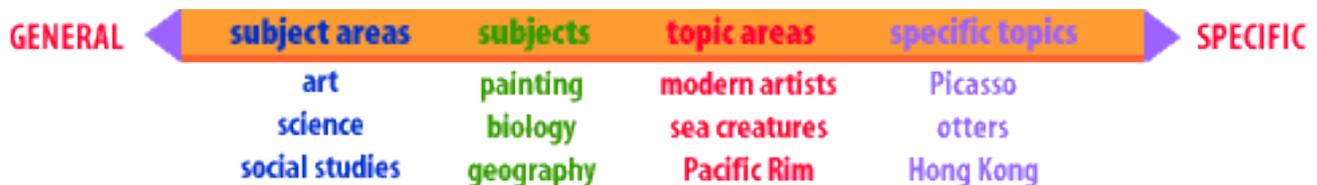- **Find a topic that fits**

Consider the Assignment

When teachers assign reports, they often say something like:

"Write a report on _____"

What goes in the **blank?** Sometimes it's just a general subject area, such as **science** or **history**. Other times it's a general topic, such as **a river animal** or **a president**. And sometimes it's a specific topic, such as **American Alligator** or **George Washington**.

Think about your assignment. Is it general, specific or somewhere in between? Use the picture below to help you decide.

Where does your assignment fit?

Find a Topic That Fits

Your goal is to pick a **specific topic** for your report. One like the words on the **right end** in the picture above. Here's a way to do this. Start with your subject area.

Step One: Choose Your Subject Area

Once you know the **subject area** for your report, think of a **subject** that fits. For example, say your teacher tells you to write a **science** report. Think of a **subject** in **science** that interests you. Let's say you like **ecology**. Great! Choose **ecology** as your **subject**.

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Step Two: Choose Your Subject

Once you know the **subject**, pick a **topic area** in that **subject**. For example, let's say you've decided to write a report about **ecology**. Think of a **topic area** in **ecology** that appeals to you. Maybe you are interested in **endangered species**. You can use **endangered species** as your topic area.

Step Three: Choose Your Topic Area

Once you know the **topic area** of your report, pick a **specific topic** that fits. For example, let's say you've decided to write a report about **endangered species**. Choose a **specific topic** in **endangered species** that interests you. You might pick **jaguars**, the **California condor**, or **wildlife habitat improvement.**

Step Four: Research Your Specific Topic

Congratulations! Now you have a **topic** for your report. But, before you decide for sure that you want to write about this topic, you might want to do a little research on it. Look for materials about your topic. Read some of the materials you find. Make sure the topic is interesting to you. If it isn't, you might want to start over and pick a different topic.

A SHORTCUT!

All of the In Context databases have a **Browse Topics** or **Browse Issues** button in their banner. You can choose a **subject area** and get a **list of popular topics**. This is a great way to jump start choosing a topic as you can click on a topic and find out a little more to see if it interests you.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Sometimes it's hard to pick a report topic. If you get stuck, here's a list of questions you might ask yourself to help you pick a topic:

- What have we been studying in class this year?

- Which subjects appeal to me?

- What are we currently studying in class?

- What are other people writing about?

- What's most interesting to me?

- Can I find materials about that?

Need more help? Ask your librarian!

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