Developing a Research Topic

This exercise will help you detail what you already know about your topic and perhaps highlight some of your assumptions or biases. Your answers to these questions along with other questions and thoughts that occur to you will be useful as you plan your research strategy and begin your project.

**FIRST:** State your topic simply in one or two sentences.

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**WHY?** Why did you select this topic? What interests you about it? What opinions on the issues do you already have?

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**HOW?** How do people refer to your topic? Do different groups use distinct terms to describe or discuss the issues? What keywords (phrases, buzzwords, vocabulary, jargon, etc.) come to mind when you think about your topic?

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**WHERE?** What places or areas will you include in your research? Are there specific regions, countries, states, or cities pertinent to your topic? Will you be comparing policy or legal practices in different places? Will you be examining religious or cultural values and practices concerning your topic?

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**WHEN?** Are you interested in finding current day, recent past, or historical information? Are there specific dates or periods of time associated with your topic? Will you be comparing past practice with today’s standards?

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**WHO?** Who cares enough about this topic that they might write or publish information on it? Which professions or occupations are associated with the issues involved? Which academic disciplines are likely to study the issues? Are there individuals who might form organizations concerned with the issues? Can you think of any well-known persons associated with the topic or experts on it?

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