

Getting Started

Whenever you write—as a student in a composition classroom or a professional in a workplace—you focus on a specific topic. In some instances, you may be asked to address a general theme or a specific topic or issue. For example, your instructor might ask you to respond to an essay you’ve read for class, or your manager at work might ask you to develop and share plans to improve business or increase sales. Other times, most often in the course of college work, you get to start from scratch and choose a topic purely out of your experience, interest, and curiosity.

So, how do you choose a topic? Where should you start? One place might be this book. The Index of Themes, page T-1, organizes every reading in the text by topic, and the Index of Genres, page G-1, will help you see the relationship between topic choice and genre choice.

The best way to get started on identifying a topic that is meaningful to you is to get your ideas flowing. Following are some ways to do that.

Talk to people. Discuss your topic ideas and questions with classmates, friends, family, and coworkers to find out what others have to say about the topic you’re considering. Often, explaining why you’re interested in a topic can help you focus. When others ask you to clarify your ideas, you will often discover what you really want to say.

Make a brainstorm list. What do you care most about? Begin by making a list of things you are passionate about, your pet peeves, things you are curious about, things you don’t understand, or things you’d like to change about the world. From your initial list, force yourself to double or triple the size of the list. Often the best topic ideas are the less obvious ones—ideas that will come to you when you push yourself to keep listing.

BRAINSTORM LIST **Gwen Ganow** (STUDENT), *Ideas for the “Take a Position” Assignment*

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English 121
English Composition

Date: October 21, 2016
Name: Gwen Ganow
Brainstorm List: Ideas for the “Take a Position” Assignment
What issues, ideas, or practices do I care about most? What topics would I want to take a position on?

PASSIONS

Movies
Comic books
Video games
Hiking
Dogs
Camping

PET PEEVES/CURIOSITIES

Why do people hate?
How to respond to hate?
Why do people drive slowly in the left lane?
Should I major in biology?
Why do people toss their beer cans on the ground at concerts?

MORE IDEAS

Superheroes
Good guys save the world
Gay rights
Winter hikes
How to stay safe on a mountain in bad weather
Summer hikes
Border collies
Animal rescue
Best training methods for dogs
Water conservation
Zombies
Simpsons
How bad are sugary cereals?
Batman and the remakes
Why is black associated with bad guys?
What is the most humane way to keep elk out of your yard if you live outside a city?
Adventure films
Bacteria: what jobs could I get that deal with bacteria?
What kind of training could police departments implement to improve public relations?