Gale Resources Tip Sheet

Gale In Context Toolbox—How to Choose a Topic

The **Gale 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.

If you have to write a report but don't have a topic yet, don't worry. 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 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 the **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:

GENERAL ◄	subject areas	subjects	topic areas	specific topics	► SPECIFIC
	art	painting	modern artists	Picasso	
	science	biology	sea creatures	otters	
	social studies	geography	Pacific Rim	Hong Kong	

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. To do this, start with your subject area.

Step One: Choose Your Subject

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.** Choose **ecology** as your **subject.**

Step Two: Choose Your Topic Area

Now that 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're interested in **endangered species.** You can use **endangered species** as your topic area.

Step Three: Choose Your Specific Topic

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.**

Gale, here for **everyone.**

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Step Four: Research Your Specific Topic

Congratulations! Now you have a **topic** for your report. 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 and read some of what you find. Make sure the topic is interesting to you. If it isn't, you consider starting over and picking a different topic.

A Shortcut

All of the *Gale In Context* resources have a **Browse Topics** or **Browse Issues** button on the home page. 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

If you get stuck picking a topic, here's a list of questions you might ask:

- 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?

You can download a worksheet for help choosing a topic here:
https://support.gale.com/doc/choosingtopic_ws

Need more help? Ask your librarian!

Gale, here for **everyone.**