

SELECT AND LIMIT YOUR TOPIC

1

A good researcher can select a specific topic appropriate to the assignment.

- ◆ How do you select a topic?
- ◆ Getting ideas
- ◆ Choosing an appropriate topic



How do you select and limit your topic?

Read your assignment thoroughly and ask questions to clarify what you do not understand.

Steps for selecting your topic

- Generate ideas. (Refer to the following page “Getting Ideas”)
- Do preliminary research by reading an overview of the topic in an encyclopedia, biography, or specialized text or on the internet.

Steps for limiting your topic:

- Ask yourself questions that help you think critically. Start with the 5 W’s: Who? What? Why? When? and Where? If those questions do not help you narrow your topic sufficiently, proceed to the next step.
- Ask the analytical questions: How did this come to be? What are the causes? What are the results? What happens next? How does this compare? How does this contrast? What is the value? These questions will help you think through your topic. Then let your mind make connections.

Questions to ask yourself about your topic:

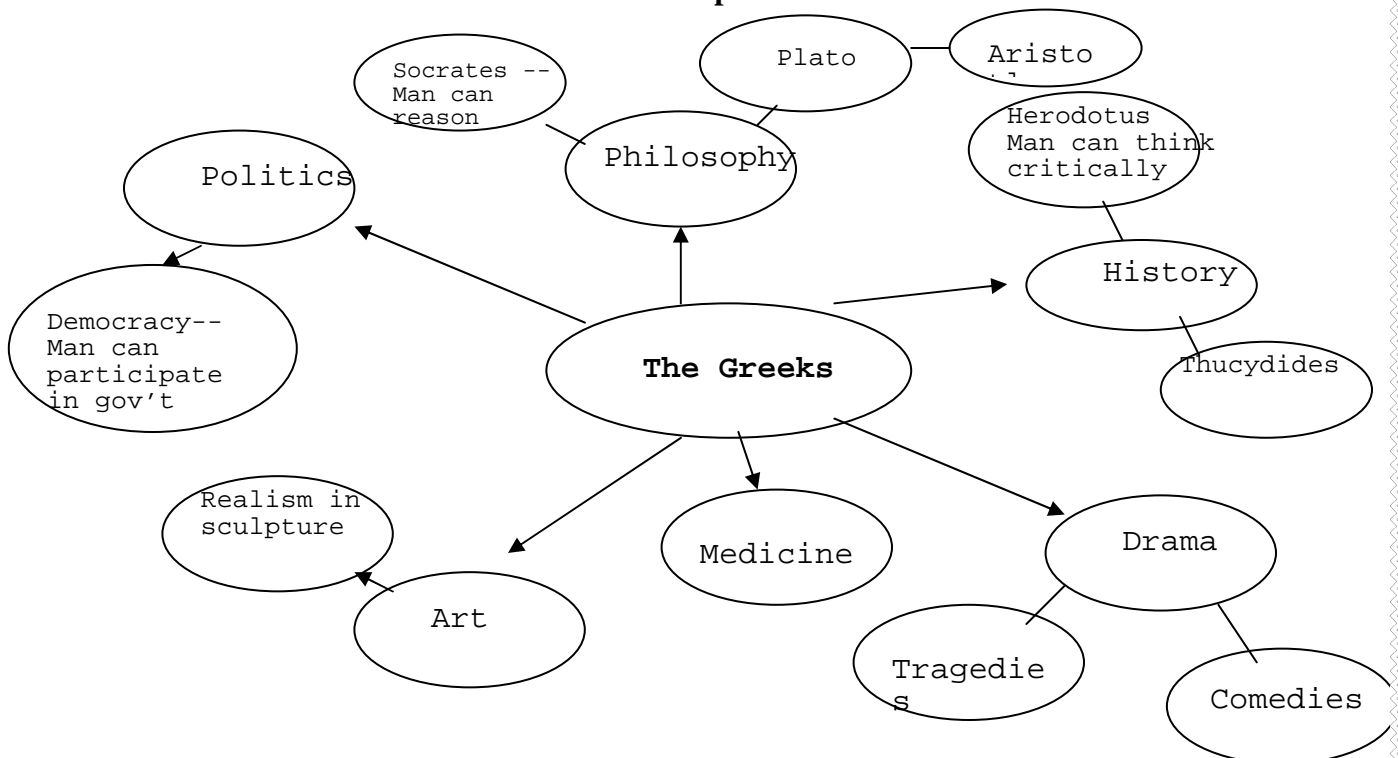
- Is my topic interesting to me?
- Is there enough information on my topic?
- Will I be able to complete my research project in the time given?

Getting Ideas

First, make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the material you will be writing about and with the instructions for the assignment. Then experiment with the following techniques to see which one works best for you. Different people have different styles of working.

1. **Brainstorming:** Make a list of everything you can think of that relates to your topic. When you finish, decide which parts of your list you want to use as main points, which parts you want to use as supporting details, and which parts you do not want to use.
2. **Guided Freewriting:** Get out a few sheets of paper and set a timer for five minutes. During those five minutes, write down everything you can think of that relates to your topic. Keep writing the whole time—do not pause to think. When your five minutes is up, look back over what you have written and choose which ideas you will use in your essay. Then arrange and develop these ideas as you start creating your project.
3. **Mapping:** Draw a “map” or “web” of your ideas. Draw a circle around the topic in the middle of the page, then put things that are more specific in circles connected to that one, then put things that are even more specific in circles connected to those circles. See the example below.
4. **Idea Diagram:** Make a copy of the form for an idea diagram on the following page. Fill in the spaces with your ideas for an introduction, subtopics, details, and conclusion.

How did Greek culture stress the importance of the individual?



IDEA DIAGRAM

TOPIC:

INTRODUCTION:

SUBTOPICS:

DETAILS:

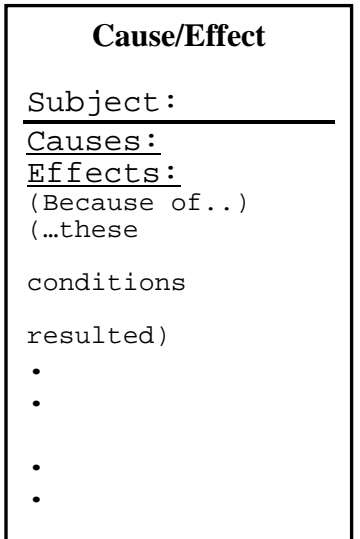
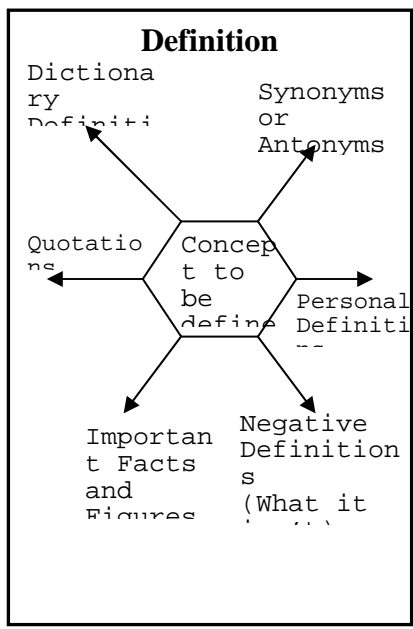
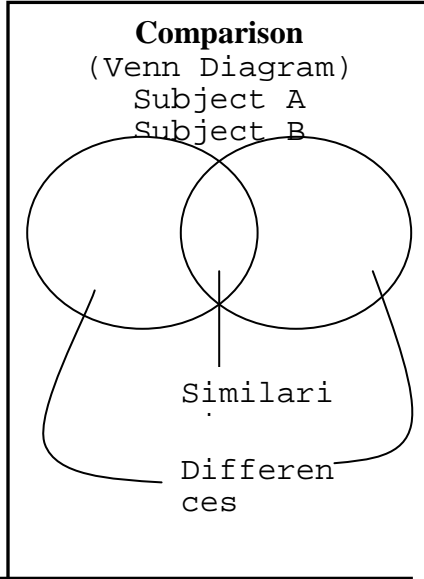
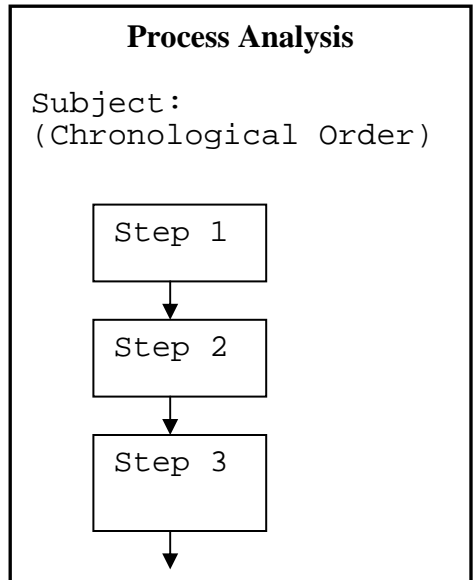
 _____ _____

 _____ _____

 _____ _____

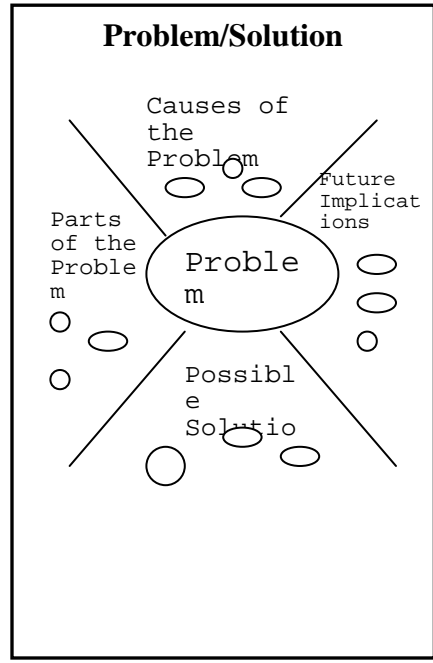
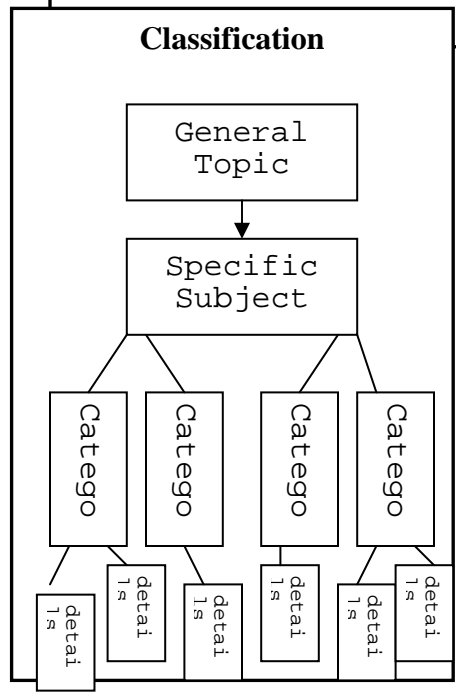
CONCLUSION:

Other Graphic Organizers



Comparison

Qualities	Subject A	Subject B



Evaluation

Subject:

Points to Evaluate	Supporting Details
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Choosing an Appropriate Topic

Avoid a topic that is

Too broad The Ice Age is far too broad a topic, but the role of the Ice Age in the formation of the Great Lakes will work. Hieroglyphics is too broad a topic, but how original Egyptian hieroglyphics are protected will work.

Too narrow By contrast also avoid a topic that is too narrow, one for which little information is available. For example, metric cooking conversions is too narrow; it can be explained in a few sentences or even a chart. The complexity of national metric conversion, however, has sufficient breadth for a suitable topic.

Too trivial Topics may not be meaningful enough to others.

Too subjective Topics that are too personal to you may not be as meaningful to others.

Too controversial You could have a tendency to get bogged down in arguments and support.

Too familiar Topics too familiar to you may bore others. They also may lead you to skip over information that you take for granted but others need to know.

Too technical You may become too overwhelmed learning the technical language of what you are writing about.

Too factual Your project should be more than just recitation of facts.

Too new A new topic may have inadequate and insufficient resources.

Too regional Local topics generally lack sufficient resources for a well-developed project.

GATHER AND ORGANIZE YOUR MATERIAL

2

A successful researcher must be able to understand the purpose of the research project and organize her time.

- ◆ What do you need?



What do you need?

For all research: copy of the assignment, teacher handouts and evaluation criteria, teacher deadlines, and research guide.

Research paper: index cards or electronic cards, enclosure for cards, pen (will not smear), disc for backup

Poster or other visual presentation: poster board, markers, construction paper, tape, glue, etc.

Technology presentation (power point, web page, video): knowledge of the tool (or remember it will take time to learn this skill), discs or portable drives, and presentation equipment

Oral presentation: note cards or notes for the presentation, time for rehearsal

You must manage your time for all projects. If your teacher has not provided a list of deadlines, create one for yourself. And then stick to your plan and finish on time. Remember, missing deadlines results in grade penalties.