



*Take a few moments to gather your  
current materials...*

*What is your research assignment?*

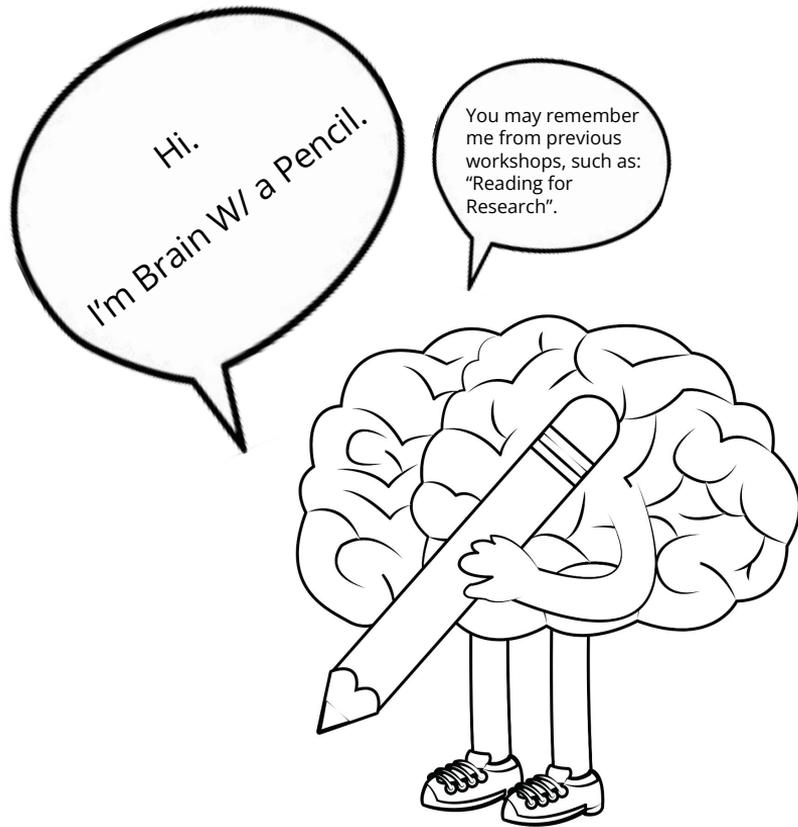


# Specifying Research Questions

A Writing Guide Presentation

Kirkwood Adams  
Maria Baker  
CK Kirch





# Today's Workshop:

## Initial Research Strategies

- *From Topic to Question*
- *Specifying Re/search Terms*

## Example:

*"I'm thinking about writing something about how immigration policy affects migrant children..."*

*Or maybe*

*"About why the Ethiopian Soccer Team has such devoted fans even though they're not winning?"*

---

We want to get something more specific because it gives you a concrete **object of analysis/exhibit**

& because the question is motivated by **knowledgeable ignorance (true curiosity)**, your research will yield new knowledge

In relation to that ignorance/curiosity you'll be in a position to ask newer more sophisticated questions you couldn't have thought of yet, and that's point of this whole enterprise.

## How a research question develops:

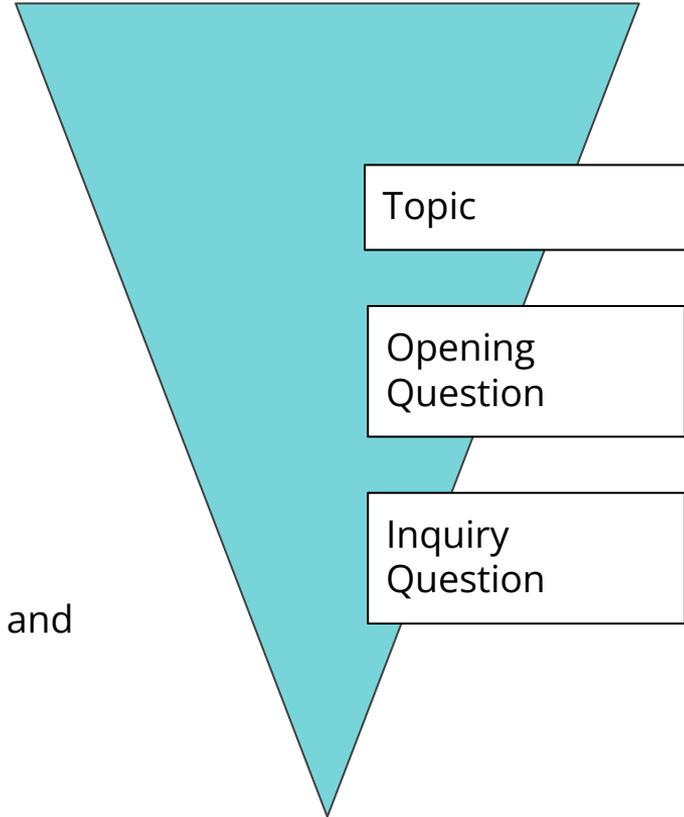
**Topic:** A broad area of interest.

(Often people get stuck at the topic level and don't know how to go deeper.)

**Opening question:** A constructive beginning.

(Following research based on your opening question, will lead to your Inquiry Question.)

**Inquiry Question:** begins to define a specific projects and stands to create new knowledge





*today we want to help you move forward in  
the research process and toward a more  
articulated question.*





*Exercise:*  
*moving from* **TOPIC** *to*  
**OPENING QUESTION**



# What are the parameters given to you by the professor or the assignment?

## **What is the prompt?**

- Is there a seed text?
- If yes, what is the role of the seed text (as described by your professor for UW P3)?

## **What lenses does the assignment imply?**

- What is the class name/department?
- What are class themes?
- What broad topics does the assignment proscribe or imply?

# What do YOU bring: Interest Inventory

- List areas or things in which you feel you have particular expertise, specific knowledge—

What qualifies? Imagine a novice needing to know or be taught about a thing, what could you teach a novice about

- List your fandoms—

What qualifies? Anything you're a fan of, that you appreciate in ways more devotedly or deeply than others

- Imagine conversations that occur amongst the experts who share your expertise. What do they talk about?

Imagine the conversations that occur amongst the fans you share passionate interests with. What do they talk about?

- Name the most important topics, events, or anythings that concern these groups.

- Is there a current debate or controversy that demands attention within your field of expertise or fandom?

What would motivate you or others to participate in a conversation on such matters?

- What question needs to be asked most in relation to your field(s) of interest?

- Imagine the kinds of disciplines that might make interesting contributions to the inquiries you've named.

Why would we need to hear from those kinds of experts in relation to your inquiry? What would we stand to gain by bringing those voices into conversation?

## Narrowing your Scope I:

You get from broad to specific by

### COMBINING SEARCH TERMS

First, take what you know from the parameters of the assignment/class itself

- Think of your topic as an **umbrella term**. What other terms does it contain?
- Who would you be interested in hearing from. **Disciplines?**
- Consider multiple ways to capture similar ideas. Generate **synonyms** for search terms.

Second, combine these topic-level terms with search terms from your Interest Inventory.



*let's visualize this simply:*



# Connecting Search Terms

Look for connections, mash-ups, overlaps:

Ask a question about your interest(s) in relation to the broader topic.

climate change

Catalog 

View and filter all 25,713 results

dogs

Catalog 

View and filter all 11,987 results

*"But does climate change affect dogs?"*

dogs "climate change"

Catalog 

View and filter all 29 results



*now for a more complex illustration:*



**Umbrella terms getting narrower:**

Climate Change

Sea level rise

Coastal erosion

Threats to my vacation home

Coast erosion due to sea level rise in the Outer Banks of North Carolina

Local Government's response to sea level rise in the Outer Banks of North Carolina

**What Synonyms can you generate?**

Global Warming  
Ocean level increase  
Flooding

**How does my motivation Or interest factor in?**

**What disciplines do you want to bring to this focus?**

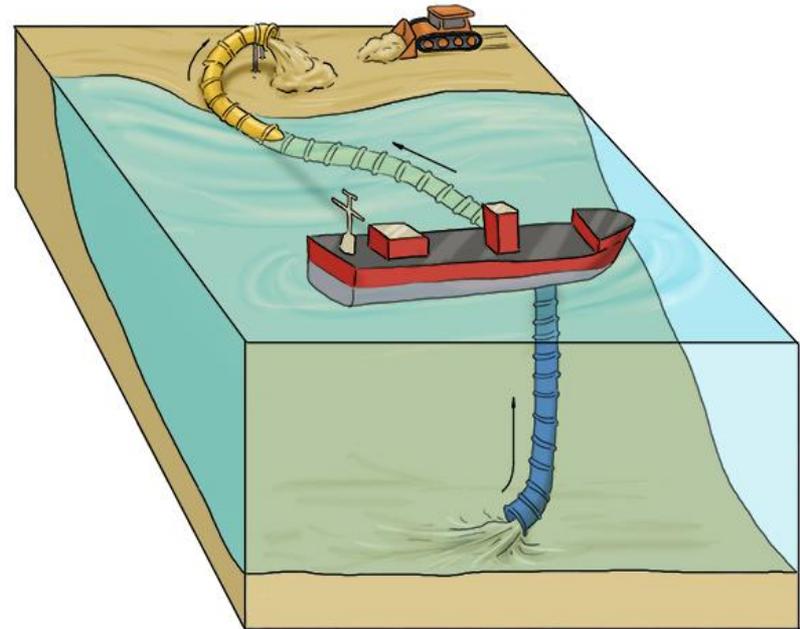
Economists, Political Scientists, Marine Biologists, etc.

Beach Nourishment is a common solution approved of by many coastal communities.



**WHAT DON'T WE KNOW ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?**

**WHAT TO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?**



# Our Research now yields more interesting results.

**WHAT IS THE CURRENT CONVERSATION ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?  
HOW CAN YOUR INQUIRY MAKE A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION?**

1 January 2018

[Translator Disclaimer](#)

## The Impact of Sand Nourishment on Beach Safety

*John Fletemeyer, John Hearin, Brian Haus, Andrea Sullivan*

[Author Affiliations +](#)

*J. of Coastal Research*, 34(1):1-5 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.2112/JCOASTRES-D-17A-00006.1>

ARTICLE

FIGURES &  
TABLES

REFERENCES

CITED BY ▾

Fletemeyer, J.; Hearin, J.; Haus, B., and Sullivan, A., 2018. The Impact of Sand Nourishment on Beach Safety. *Journal of Coastal Research*, 34(1), 1-5. Coconut Creek (Florida), ISSN 0749-02028.

Beaches in the United States and around the world have enormous economic, social, and recreational value. In the United States, [Houston \(1996, 2013\)](#) placed the value of beaches at \$1.2 trillion annually, and in Florida, [Murley \(2003\)](#) reported that the 825 miles of sandy beaches had an annual impact of \$41.6 billion in revenue at that time. The economic value of beaches, particularly those devoted to public recreation, is highly dependent on the aesthetic quality of the beach. However, more than one-half of U.S. beaches are considered to be critically eroded, putting this critical resource at risk.

## The problem with beach nourishment

Beach nourishment is another chapter in the never-ending tale of erosion.

By Carlos Waters | [carlos.waters@vox.com](mailto:carlos.waters@vox.com) | Dec 10, 2018, 10:40am EST

[f](#) [t](#) [SHARE](#)



## Narrowing your Scope II:

- **Time** (limit the timeframe of your project)
- **Place** (Anchor the project in a particular location)
- **Person** (Use the particulars of a person to reveal 'generalities' about a group.)
- **Story** (ground the larger story in a specific smaller one)

---

*These types of narrowing might help guide you toward an exhibit.*

**Let's look at these narrowing criteria (& there are others!) in relation to our example project. We moved from the broad topic of "climate change" to the potential questions to be asked of "beach nourishment".**

**If we narrow down to a particular instance or case, we'd have a better chance of developing a targeted inquiry & giving ourselves more concrete sites of analysis.**

## Example:

*About why the Ethiopian Soccer Team has such devoted fans even though they're not winning?"*

---

The exhibit ended up being a video of particular parade thrown for the soccer team. This narrowed time and story and place. Psychologists contributed insight about fan behavior and what binds fans to a teams. While doing research, subclaims emerged and the question itself became more refined.

So, this turned out to be a good **opening question**.

---

Refining your research question is a  
layered process!!

**DISCOVERING**

**ELIMINATING**

**CONFIRMING**

**REVISING**

---

## Includes materials from...

- Ballenger, Bruce P. *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers*. Pearson, 2012.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago Press. 2003.
- Burkhardt, Joanna M. *Teaching information literacy : 50 standards-based exercises for college students* / Joanna M. Burkhardt, Mary C. MacDonald ; with Andrée J. Rathemacher 2nd ed, Chicago : American Library Association, 2010.
- Wakuma Yebasse's Progression 3 Essay Questions