How to Narrow Your Research Topic

When someone starts a research assignment, a typical mistake is to think too broadly about it. This is usually born out of having an interest in a subject but a limited understanding of everything that subject could encompass. For instance, if you wanted to write a paper about hip-hop music, you might do a search for that term in the databases and find yourself overwhelmed by all the information and unsure where to start! If you tried to write about all of the information such a broad search would turn up, you would soon find yourself with a book-length manuscript. Since your assignments are likely to be measured in pages instead of chapters, you will want to narrow your topic down as much as possible. Here are some methods for narrowing your topic:

Ask Questions
One approach is to ask questions about your topic to narrow it down: Think, “Who, what, when, where, how?”

*Question: What about hip-hop do I want to talk about?*
Possible Answers: Hip-hop and activism? Hip-hop and therapy? Hip-hop and conflict resolution?

*Question: Who do I want to talk about?*
Possible Answers: Teenagers? Adults? Students?

*Question: Where do I want to talk about?*
Possible Answers: Workplace? High school?

**Possible Narrowed Topic:**
How can high schools use hip-hop conflict resolution to increase student safety?

Bring Yourself into the Paper
Another approach is to take an assigned topic and then try to find out how something you are personally interested in relates to that topic.

*Assigned Topic: Climate Science*
Possible Focus: How can businesses benefit by going green?

Possible Focus: How does meat consumption impact climate and ecology?

Possible Focus: How could the music industry become more ecologically friendly?
Narrow Your Research Topic

What is your subject or broad topic?
_________________________________

What about this subject do you want to talk about?
______________________________________________________________________________

Who do you want to talk about?
______________________________________________________________________________

Where do you want to talk about?
______________________________________________________________________________

What about this subject interests me?
______________________________________________________________________________

How can I relate this subject to an area that interests me?
______________________________________________________________________________