Narrowing the Topic

Get background information on your topic

Find books on your topic and identify related issues

Find a brief overview of your topic in an encyclopedia

Make a list of keywords identified when browsing. This will help you narrow your topic.

Steps to Narrowing a Topic

First start out with a general topic (e.g. space exploration). Take the topic and break it down into categories. E.g. You can ask questions about the five W’s and H.

Who? (American Space Exploration)

What? (Manned Space Missions)

Where? (Moon Exploration)

When? (Space exploration in the 1960’s)

Why? (Quest to leave Earth)

How? (Rocket to the Moon: Space Exploration)

Next, consider specific areas to generate ideas to narrow down your topic. For example,

Problems faced? (Sustaining Life in Space: Problems with space exploration)

Problems overcome? (Effects of zero gravity on astronauts)

Motives? (Beating the Russians: Planning a moon mission)

Effects on a group? (Renewing faith in science: aftershock of the Moon mission)

Group affected? (From Test Pilots to Astronauts: the new heroes of the Air force)

Group benefited? (Corporations that made money from the American Space Program)

Finally, refine your ideas by considering some other factors, for example:

S = Similarities (Similar issues to overcome between the 1969 moon mission and the planned 2009 Mars Mission)

O = Opposites (American pro and con opinions about the first mission to the moon)

C = Contrasts (Protest or patriotism: different opinions about cost vs. benefit of the moon mission)

R = Relationships (the NASA family: from the scientists on earth to the astronauts in the sky)

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