

Identifying a Topic of the Project

(for passion projects!)

1. Brainstorm 15-20 ideas of general topics. At this point they can be broad and unrealistic. Have them written down.
2. Pitch most of them to yourself or entertain any other form of selection process.
3. Narrow it down to 1-3 ideas that stand out.
4. For any idea that stands out:
 - What questions you can ask in this general topic that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) questions?
 - Should you find the solution, who benefits from it? Who are the stakeholders?
 - How do you imagine an MVP (minimal viable product) that comes out of your analytical project?
 - What can you infer?
 - What can you predict?
 - What can be your dependent variable?
 - What possible features you can use?
 - Is there room for building on top of an MVP? What questions you can potentially ask to extend the scope of the project if you choose to do so.
5. Narrow down to one choice.
6. Do research:
 - If somebody already answered this question, you can look for new perspective
 - If not, it is great, you are onto something!
7. Iterate until you are excited about your project.
8. Formulate the problem statement, objectives, stakeholders and save it for later use.

Vocabulary

Problem Statement introduces the problem you are going to solve and answers the question why you should spend your energy on this problem. Your goal is to address the importance of the problem, background, potential impact and limitations.

Note: In academic or corporate settings, it is an essential part of research proposal that aims to ignite interest and to convince a reader to continue reading the proposal. But don't worry about it too much, you are not writing a formal proposal for the project.

Objectives drill down into the purpose of your project. Indicate your plan: what you want to achieve by solving this problem? Break down your general project objective into smaller objectives. Think specific, achievable goals. You can formulate your objectives as a set of questions or a set of hypotheses.

Stakeholders are parties who hold interest in your project. Define them as broad groups and then narrow down the definitions as much as you see reasonable (up to specific persons who will benefit from your analysis). Keep both broad and narrow definitions.