

To define a topic for your research paper, begin with **broad parameters and narrow down**.

### **Example: Gun Violence**

Using a general topic, such as gun violence, conduct an initial survey. While **Wikipedia** does not qualify as an acceptable source, it is a good place to get an overview of a topic and perhaps a general direction. The citations at the bottom of a Wikipedia entry may lead in some cases to a source that is relevant to your evolving topic and acceptable.

**Brainstorming** and scanning the Wikipedia article for gun violence may lead to a more refined topic:

**Gun Violence → Gun Violence in the United States → Gun Policy in the United States→ Gun Violence and Children → School Shootings → Gun Policy in the United States after Columbine**

This is still a broad field. One way to refine your topic (and make your life easier!) is to consider the topic in terms of **currency**. The Columbine massacre took place in 1999, and many other school shootings have taken place since then. Policy and arguments surrounding policy have also changed a lot in 20 years. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting took place much more recently, on February 14, 2018, and it continues to receive attention from activists, reporters, politicians, and commentators on both sides of the issue.

**Gun Policy in the United States after Columbine → Gun Violence in the United States after Stoneman Douglas**

We've narrowed down to policy pertaining to a particular form of gun violence, in a particular place, and in a particular time period. If you haven't already been searching library resources, now is the time!