

A few tips for finding an “idea.” Use at your own discretion.

1. Three strategies for finding a topic:

- a. Look up list of JEL codes and focus on what draws your attention:
http://www.aeaweb.org/jel/jel_class_system.php
- b. Read article titles and notice what tends to catch your attention (hint: limit content by focusing on “high quality” journals in economics. What is a top journal? Google “journal rankings economics”)
- c. Read newspapers, magazines, blogs (examples: The Economist, Bloomberg Magazine, The NY Times, <http://marginalrevolution.com/>, <http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com/>, <http://paulkrugmanblog.com/>, <http://blogs.berkeley.edu/author/bdelong/>, <http://www.freakonomics.com/blog/>, <http://www.becker-posner-blog.com/>, <http://econlog.econlib.org/>, <http://www.env-econ.net/>)

2. Three Strategies for finding a research question:

- a. Browse through content that lies within topic(s) you identified above (use a search engine of your choice, e.g., Google or Google Scholar)
- b. Quickly identify the idea or question that is presented in previous literature (jot it down, highlight or circle it).
- c. Cogitate. Ask yourself: “what questions remain?” For Econ 3338, suggested innovations relative to previous work would be:
 - i. Comparison of sub-groups (different types of individuals, types of counties, different time periods). Hint: see “interaction effects” in chapter 8 of the SW.
 - ii. Demonstrating that LSA assumptions fail (i.e. looking at influence of omitted variables on a coefficient of interest, looking at residuals for serial correlation, etc.)

Now what?

Proceed iteratively through 1 and 2 with an aim to boiling things down to a *specific* question. How?

Ask yourself: what is the “Y” or set of “Ys”? What are the “Xs”?

Two most common pitfalls:

- A. The question is a topic not a question (i.e. the topic is unemployment and the question is unemployment...?), or
- B. The question is a question, but it is too broad. In this case, the question is too general to be answered empirically.

Avoid the pitfalls and safely move to step 3:

3. Three strategies for finding data:

- a. Go to the library data website: <http://guides.library.dal.ca/data> or talk to our subject librarian: <http://guides.library.dal.ca/profile.php?uid=166>
- b. Check data sources for Journal articles identified in 1 and 2
 - i. All articles will direct you to data sources (i.e. like a shopping mall for data!)
 - ii. Some journal articles will provide the data (some even provide it in STATA format!)
- c. See my website under “resources” for data links:
<http://myweb.dal.ca/cr723224/links.html>