

Campusweite Schreibwerkstatt

Finding a topic

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Many students consider finding a topic as the most complicated step in scientific writing. When you feel the topic you chose lacks relevance or interest, you will not be motivated to finish your text. At the same time, you want your topic to comply with the demands of scientific community, to be practically workable and to be situated within scientific discourse. In order not to capitulate, it may be helpful, in a first stage, to scan your personal interests and possible questions on a broad scale to come up with new, individually challenging possibilities. In a second step, you will limit your results according to scientific standards.

In this handout, you will learn various methods to help you find a topic. You should use only those strategies that seem suitable and helpful to you.

Interview

Goals:

- Outlining your personal interests
- Activating your prior knowledge and developing your own thoughts
- Getting feedback and another view on your topic project

Procedure:

- Talk about your topic with a fellow student according to the following structure:
 1. During the interview, your fellow student let you do the talking and thinking. He or she can rely on the questions printed below, or note questions that result from the conversation.
 2. After the interview, your fellow students will give you a thorough feedback telling you his or her impression as well as ideas that might help you realizing your topic.
 3. You should take notes in order not to forget anything.

What in your studies/your course interested you in particular? What kind of questions/contents do you absolutely <i>not</i> want to write about? What is your personal interest in you topic? What isn't? What do you want to find out? What do you know about your topic so far? Is there any research you can base your paper upon?	personal interest, curiosity
What kind of material do you need? Is it accessible for you? Which methods do you need? Do you know them well enough? Are they workable in the given time? Which difficulties may occur?	manageability
Can your paper deliver a new aspect to research? Does your paper correspond to current trends in research?	(major papers only) scientific relevance

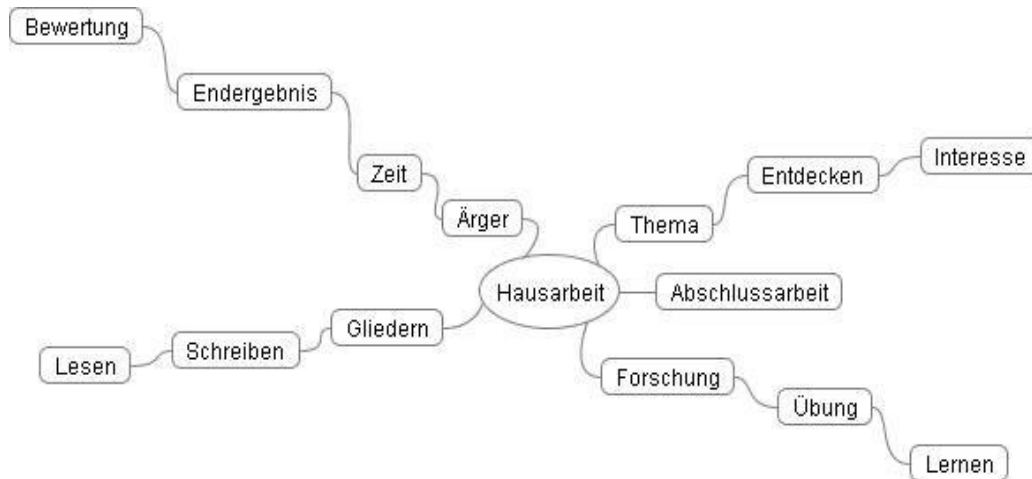
Cluster

Goals:

- Generating new ideas

Procedure:

- Note your rough topic as a keyword in the middle of a blank sheet of paper and draw a circle around it.
- Add chains of associations as fast and uncensored as possible, writing them down and connecting them with lines. Keeping up the pace, continue writing down words or circling them until you come up with a new one in order to stay in the flow.
- When no more ideas come to your mind or when you cannot establish any link to your first word, you end your chain and start a new one.



Variation 1: Note your associations without the circle frame and without connecting lines around your first word.

Variation 2: Instead of associations, write down all the questions that you connect with your topic.

- In the end, you need to select some of the aspects you have noted. You then can proceed to limit and structure it.

ABC-Darium

Goals:

- Generating as many ideas as possible around a rough topic
- openness towards new, original perspectives

Procedure:

- To create an ABC-Darium, you write down each letter of the alphabet or of your rough topic vertically.
- Quickly add words that contain a (first) letter.
- In the end, you need to select some of the aspects you have noted. You then can proceed to limit and structure it.

Examples:

<u>Variation 1</u>				<u>Variation 2</u>
A	G	M	S	T
B	H	N	Topic	E
Citations	Introduction	O	U	WRITING
D	J	P	V	M
E	K	Q	W	P
F	L	R	X	RESEARCH
			Y	P
			Z	E
				R