Limiting a topic
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Once you have found a suitable general topic, you then need to define and justify a niche in it. Methods for limiting your topic can help you find out whether your subject fits the scope of your scientific paper.

The following pages will present you to different examples and methods for limiting your topic. You should use only those tools that you consider appropriate and helpful.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>father</th>
<th>father role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father role in parenting</td>
<td>participation of the father in infant care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development 1969 to today</td>
<td>in western industrialized countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facing changing gender relations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>father</th>
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<tr>
<td>father role in parenting</td>
<td>during the first 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>subjective role construction</td>
<td>in an urban environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural differences in role perception</td>
<td>fathers from southern, eastern and central Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>recorded via narrative interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsuitable topic</th>
<th>Suitable topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language development in early childhood</td>
<td>Development of sentence formation during the second year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-West conflict</td>
<td>Changes in the image of the ’East’ in ’Der Spiegel’ between 1989 and 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights situation in the third world</td>
<td>Changes in the UN human rights policy in respect to conflicts in Africa around 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental policies in the USA</td>
<td>The struggle about drilling rights in Alaska during the second term of George W. Bush</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Criteria for limiting a topic

Goal:
• getting to know and use criteria in order to limit a topic

Procedure:
• Below follows a list of ideas that may help you limit your topic. Not every criteria fits every discipline or topic.
• Choose criteria you can apply to your topic and formulate appropriate, limited variations.

1. Time: from... until..., in the ...th century, in the classical period
2. Place: in Frankfurt, in the Alps, in Northern Germany
3. Institutions: in Universities, in federal state museums
4. Group of persons: adolescents, women, employees
5. Source: in a daily newspaper, in a documentary
6. Person: in the works/writings/personal statements of...
7. Disciplinary aspects: pedagogical, theological, linguistic...
8. Method: narratological analysis
9. Theorists: according to ...s model
10. Connection to a second topic/situation: in consideration of...
11. Chosen aspects/examples/particular cases: the penal system as bureaucracy, the church as a male world

Often, several criteria are combined, e.g.
• municipal politics of the SPD in the postwar period
• The influence of the agriculture lobby on Bavarian agriculture politics in the 1980s
• Women as target group for TV commercials in the 1970s
• Political protest in American pop music. The songs of Woody Guthrie
**Pentagon Plan**


**Goal:**
- activating and documenting prior knowledge
- judging your work status

**Procedure:**
- write a short text to every aspect of the pentagon, or simply take notes.
- Think: Which subject area is already well thought through? What aspects should you work more on?

**Question:**
What do you want to know/show/find out? Which aspects of your topic are interesting and why?

**Hypothesis:**
What are you hoping to find out?

**Theories and terms:**
Which theories are the basis of your work?

**Objects/materials:**
Which texts/sources/data do you use?

**Method:**
How will you proceed? Will you use discipline-specific methods and why?