

The **WRITING** CENTER

**Elftmann Student
Success Center**

**A Guide On
How To:**

**Explore &
Narrow
Your Topic**

- How do I explore?
- Why should I narrow?
- Can I see an example?



Exploring & Narrowing Your Topic

Writing assignment topics are often purposefully broad to allow you to focus on an area that interests you. For many writers, however, that area is hard to find.

How do I explore a research topic?

Write a key idea in the center and list your ideas for research topics spoking outward. Your goal is to list **five or six options** to consider researching further. This is one strategy to use to focus on a single topic to center your research and your writing around. Notice in our example for the next illustration we have chosen the topic **Energy** for a research topic.

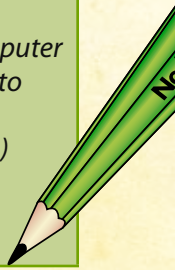
What strategies can I use to narrow my topic?

Once you have the assignment set, you can use specific strategies to get some ideas flowing: free-writing, brainstorming, and clustering. These are important to use because they will allow you to make your writing more **organized**, and give you a way to **prioritize** and **build other ideas**. Most importantly, narrowing your topic will keep it **manageable** and give you more **flexibility** to adjust to the expectations of your assignment.



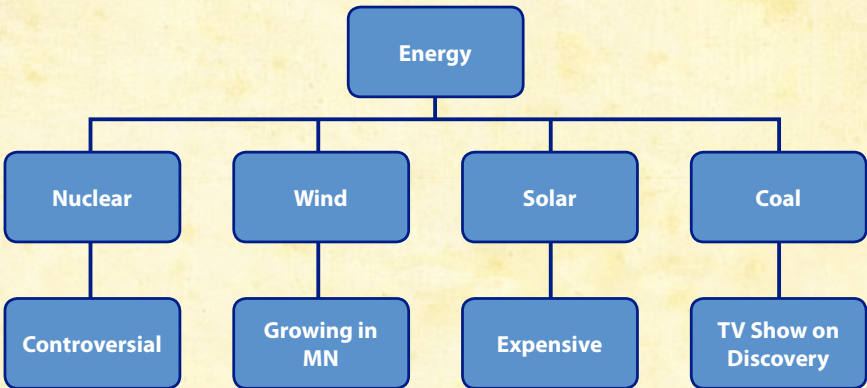
Strategy	Advantages	Hints
Free-Writing: Write without stopping for a set period of time on the topic.	<i>Helps develop the habit of thinking as you write</i> <i>Good for a topic you already have some ideas about</i>	<i>Can do verbally into an audio recorder or with a buddy</i> <i>Can do on a computer with the screen dimmed</i>

Strategy	Advantages	Hints
Brain-storming: List your thoughts on a topic for a set period of time.	<i>Good for branching off other ideas</i> <i>Easily adaptable to an outline, graphic organizer</i> <i>Easy to pick out good ideas</i>	<i>Use mental questions (who, what, when, why, where, how)</i> <i>Save on PC for reference</i>
Clustering: Write your thoughts about a topic using lines, arrows, and shapes to show relationships.	<i>Good for visual-spatial learners</i> <i>Easy to branch off other ideas, see connections between ideas</i>	<i>Use Microsoft SmartArt on computer or large medium to write on (white board, etc.)</i> <i>Use color to distinguish ideas</i>



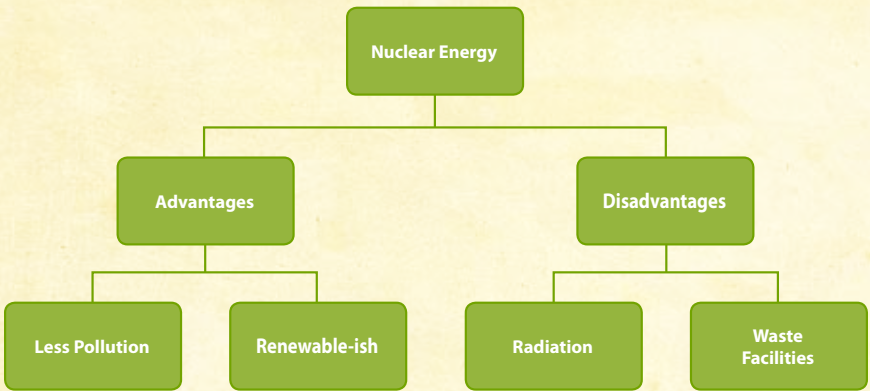
Can I see an example?

Let's say an instructor asks for an essay on energy. This topic could turn into a book by itself, so explore this topic to focus in. An example cluster is given below:

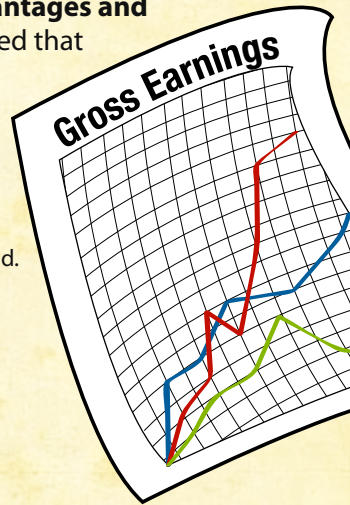


A first round of exploration sorts energy into categories. Already, there are numerous options for a good essay, but I am interested especially in the controversy around nuclear energy. It's important to look for ideas in a similar pattern you can use to set up your essay; my exploration tells me that the **argument pattern** would work well.

Now that I have a focused topic and pattern, my exploration can be narrowed by a second round:



Since I thought of the controversy over nuclear energy in the first round, my second round focused around the **advantages and disadvantages** of it. My second exploration showed that my thoughts centered around the effect on **the environment and humans**. I can now use this to find supporting evidence and build my essay.



Reference

- Gaetz, Lynne, & Phadke, Suneeti. (2009). The writer's world. Upper Saddle River, NH: Pearson Education, Inc.

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