**Your Topic and the Goldilocks Problem**

Are you having trouble finding sources for your topic? Do only 1 or 2 sources in the first five pages of your search results speak to your topic? Try filling out this quiz—and one of the charts that follows—to help!

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| When you think about your topic, do you feel as though you pretty much know everything you’re going to say about it?Yes No | When you think about your topic, do you feel anxious and overwhelmed? Yes No |
| When you search for your topic, do you type in more than 5 words?Yes No | When you search for your topic, do you type in 3 words or less?Yes No |
| When you write an outline of your final research project, do you struggle to come up with enough points to meet the assignment requirements?Yes No | When you write an outline of your final research project, do you have too many points to cover adequately?Yes No |
| Does information about your topic only show up in one kind of source (for instance, *only* online or *only* in news sources)?Yes No | Is there a Wikipedia page specifically about your topic?Yes No |
| Has your professor or another academic advisor said to you that yours is a “very specific” or “specialized” topic?Yes No | Has your professor or another academic advisor said to you that yours is a “big” or “broad” topic?Yes No |
| Has every source that you’ve read said the same thing or confirmed what you already know? Yes No | Has every source that you’ve read said something completely different about your topic or made you feel confused about your topic? Yes No |
| If you answered yes to 3 or more of these questions, consider **expanding** your topic. | If you answered yes to 3 or more of these questions, consider **narrowing** your topic. |

**If you didn’t say “yes” to 3 questions in either column, your topic is likely not what’s causing you problems.**

**You can pick either chart—Expanding or Narrowing—to complete. Doing this will give you additional search terms you can use or a different perspective toward your topic that will help in your searching process.**

***Expanding Your Research Topic***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your topic right now: |  |
| List 3-4 additional groups of *people* that could be affected by or are connected to your topic.  |  |
| List 2-3 additional *places* (either specific regions like rural MN or broad categories like elementary schools) that could be affected by or connected to your topic. |  |
| List 3-4 additional *ideas* or *concepts* that are connected to your topic. What larger categories does your topic fit into? |  |
| Why is this topic meaningful to you? Think about parts of your story that might connect with other people who share—or do not share—your experiences and identity. |  |
| Using ideas from the chart you’ve filled in above, write 2 revised topics that expand your original topic idea. |  |

***Narrowing Your Research Topic***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your topic right now: |  |
| List 3-4 groups of *people* that could be affected by or are connected to your topic.  |  |
| List 2-3 different *places* (either specific regions like rural MN or elementary schools) that could be affected by or connected to your topic. |  |
| List 3-4 *ideas* that affect or are affected by your topic. (If you struggle with this, look at your topic’s Wikipedia page.) |  |
| Why is this topic meaningful to you? Think about parts of your story that might connect with other people who share—or do not share—your experiences and identity. |  |
| Using ideas from the chart you’ve filled in above, write 2 revised topics that narrow your original topic idea. |  |