CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE PAPER TOPIC AND DEVELOPING A THESIS STATEMENT

Preliminary Steps: To Be Taken BEFORE You Begin Your Assignment

- **Read your assignment.** Take the time to read through any information you are given about the assignment.
- **Understand:** Understand what you are being asked to do and follow your professor's expectations:
  - **Length:** How long should your paper be? Do not make it either significantly outside the page range you are given.
  - **What are acceptable topics?** If your professor gives you a list of topics, do not select an alternative topic without consulting him or her.
  - **What kinds of sources does your professor expect your to use?** He or she may specify a minimum number of sources that you must use; he or she may also require that you use at least a specified number of books, articles or Internet sites.
  - **Formatting:** Follow formatting requirements. Observe MLA citation rules consistently. Citations are not the place for creativity: do not improvise!
    - Pay special attention to the type of sources your professor expects: he or she may require you to use only scholarly sources (for some tips to help you identify scholarly books, click [here](#); for tips to help you identify scholarly articles, click [here](#)).
    - If you are permitted to use Internet sites, select carefully. Internet sites vary wildly in their reliability. You may want to consult the excellent guide, [Evaluating Information Found on the Internet](#) form Johns Hopkins University library.
  - **If you are unsure about what is expected of you, be sure to ask your professor.**

About Topics

You may be tempted to select a topic that is very broad in scope. It will be up to you to narrow the topic to one that will allow you to develop a thesis statement and write a focused paper and come up with a thesis statement.

Example: **abortion** is not an appropriate topic. You could not cover everything about abortion if you were writing a Ph.D. dissertation. A suitable topic might be: "Changes in Abortion Rights in the Healthcare Reform Act." A **thesis statement** might be "Any additional restrictions imposed on abortion in the Healthcare Reform Act are consistent with the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits spending federal money on abortions"; alternatively, your thesis statement might be, "The restrictions on abortion in the Healthcare Reform Act go further than the Hyde Amendment in restricting access to abortion."
You can get some tips on how to develop a manageable topic and an appropriate thesis statement by consulting the University of Michigan's Selecting a Research Topic. In addition, don't forget the Hofstra's Writing Center. You can schedule an appointment online to work with a Writing Center Tutor or with a Research Librarian to get personal help.