# Topic development and keywords

Coming up with a research topic for an essay or a school assignment is perhaps the **most difficult** part of the research process. Most of the students that come to the library for help with their topic do so because they try to do their research using a broad, vague, or just undeveloped topic, and few or no keywords or key concepts, and thus predictably fail.

Developing a topic is almost never easy, but if we approach it as a process, where we break the task into smaller steps, we can make it easier on us.

Here's the process we will follow to develop a research topic, we will:

1. Come up with an initial **broad topic** related to the class.
2. Break down the broad topic into related **subtopics**.
3. Pick one of the subtopics and turn it into a developed topic in the form of a **research question**.
4. Review our research question to make sure it is relevant, the right scope, and interesting.
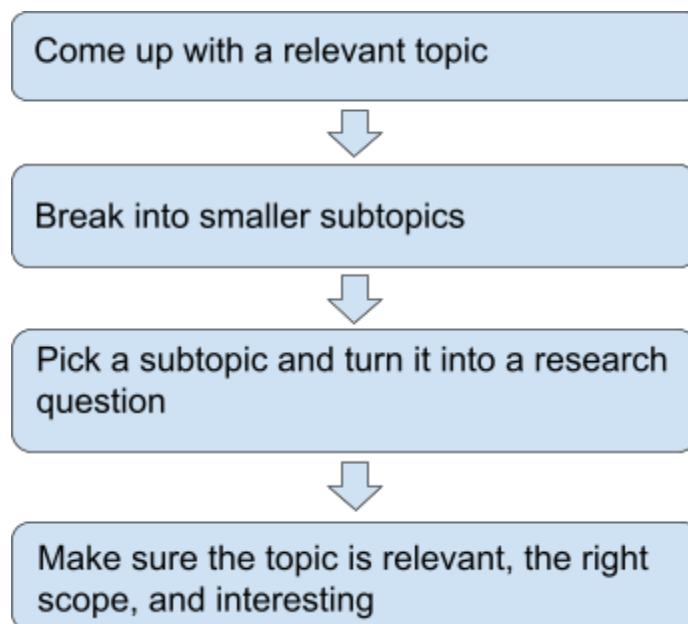
The best way to explain the process above is by using a simple example.

Developing a topic and key concepts: an example

Suppose I am taking an automotive technology class and the final exam is a term paper on a topic of my choice. I then think about how much I like trucks and tell my instructor I will

write an essay about them. Within automotive technology, trucks are a very broad **topic**. At this point I am at **step one** in the process.

Many students run into problems because it is at this point that they start looking for books and articles without developing their topic further. The problem is that the topic, in this case trucks, is very broad. There are so many brands, sizes, styles, types, and uses for trucks that just describing what a truck is would take the bulk of the paper, even more.

Instead, I continue to **step two**, I break up the bigger "trucks" topic into smaller **subtopics**. Within trucks we have pickups, semis, dump trucks, fire trucks, etc. From here I will take the "pickups" subtopic and break it down into models, for example. I will have the Chevy Silverado, the Dodge Ram, and the Ford F150. The process of breaking a broad topic into more specific subtopics is shown below:
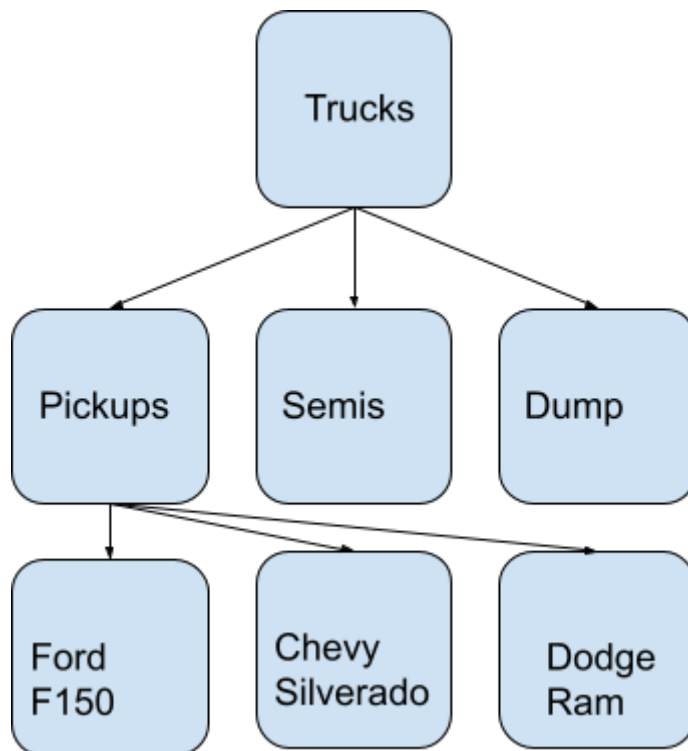
Here I will pick the Ford F150.

I could continue breaking the subtopic further by trim, fuel type, usage, model year, even individual components, like the engine or transmission. depending on what I want to talk about, but instead I will pick the Ford F150 as a topic and turn it into a **research question**. This is **step three**.

At this point, my research question could be:

How did the Ford F150 pickup truck come to be?

Or

I want to write an essay about the history of the Ford F-150 pickup truck.

Finally, I will make sure the topic is **relevant to the class, has the right scope, and most importantly, is interesting**. This is **step four**.

Since this is an automotive technology class, writing an essay about the Ford F150 will obviously be relevant, its scope is good enough to fill an average term paper with good information, and most importantly, this is a topic I actually find interesting.

Once I have my developed topic and my research question, the next step is to get some **basic information** on my topic, like **key concepts** and **keywords**. I can find this information in **encyclopedias** and **dictionaries**.

Exercise

Go to Wikipedia www.wikipedia.org and type "Ford F-150" in the search field. Before clicking the search button, look at the drop down suggested terms and click "Ford F-Series".

Once in the wikipedia page for the Ford F-Series, go over it and find basic information like the first model year, body types, US sales, etc.

Look at the page's left panel, find the **Page Information** link and click it.

Find the Wikidata item ID*, copy it and paste it in the **Exercise 2** box in the questionnaire. If you do this correctly, you will find the flag. Copy the flag and paste it in the **Flag box** to capture it..

Congratulations! You have captured the flag!