Brainstorm Your Topic

Starting your research with a quick brainstorm session is a good idea because it will help you identify:

- keywords to search in the library catalog and databases
- synonyms and alternative words for your topic
- specific ideas or questions you may want to address, that you haven’t yet considered

**Questions to ask while brainstorming:** Write in answers as short phrases or words

**WHO** are the important / influential people (artists, designers, critics, writers, philosophers etc.) involved with my topic? This could also be a group or organization rather than an individual. Who is the audience or end user?

**WHAT** are some examples of this topic? A work of art, building, film, product, service, etc.? What is it made of, what does it look like, what style is it? What are the creator’s aims, goals or concerns?

**WHEN** – what time period(s) are appropriate to this topic? Has it been around for a long time, or is it new? How did it originate? If it is historical, what are the important milestone dates in its history?

**WHERE** – is it tied to a specific country, state, city or geographic area? Has it been relocated to multiple places and if so, where? What is the importance of place to my topic?

**HOW** has this topic/idea/work influenced others? How does it relate to the larger culture or context?

**WHY** is this topic/idea important – to others, and to me?

**ONE additional question** I have about my topic, or something I would like to learn more about:

**Information sources to use:** You may need to do some background reading to answer the questions above. It’s ok to start with the basics! Bear in mind you will not END your search here – you still need to use the library catalog and databases to complete your research.

- Existing knowledge – what do you already know about this?
- Notes from class discussions and lectures
- Textbooks or other required class readings
- Quick web/Google searches
- A reference database from the SCAD library “Articles and Images” listings: Encyclopedia Britannica, Oxford Art Online or CQ Researcher are good possibilities
Create a Concept Map

Concept mapping is a way to visually organize a topic in order to identify relevant themes and connections. It can also be used to think of a topic in terms of ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ – what is the main general topic, and what are its specific facets or examples?

Apply keywords from your brainstorm (other side of this page) to this concept map below.

Feel free to draw in additional lines and bubbles as needed.

A BROADER idea related to my topic: (such as a movement, wider culture, research field, etc.)

My MAIN topic:

Synonyms or alternative words for this main topic:

Three examples or specific facets of my main topic:

Continue to refer back to this handout and add more terms and ideas as you proceed with your research.