

Selecting an Impactful Research Topic/Title

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Presentation Outline

- Research, Impact Areas, and Elements of Scientific Micro Research
- Think of the who, what, when, where and why questions
- Start with Breadth
- Develop some Depth
- Define a Research Topic
- Define a Research Topic – Refined
- Things to Consider, General and Subject-Specific Sources
- Narrowing and Broadening the Scope of your Topic
- What next?

Research and Impact Areas

What is Research?



What is Research?

“Research is a **systematic** and **organized** **effort** to **investigate** **specific** **problem** that **requires** a **solution.**”

Research?

To do
good research



Don't need to
Know
Everything

Have to know what is
Known & Unknown

Impact Areas



Why am I writing?

What impact will it have?

Why am I doing research?

What is it for?

Issues to Consider in Selecting Research Topic

- What do you feel passionate about?
- What are your strengths?
- Collaboration
- Join a productive group where more senior students mentor new students
- Selecting your own problem vs. having a problem handed to you
- Ask other students about faculty – what are their styles of interaction, what are their expectations

Research Topic with Impact?

“Choosing an interesting research topic is your first challenge.”

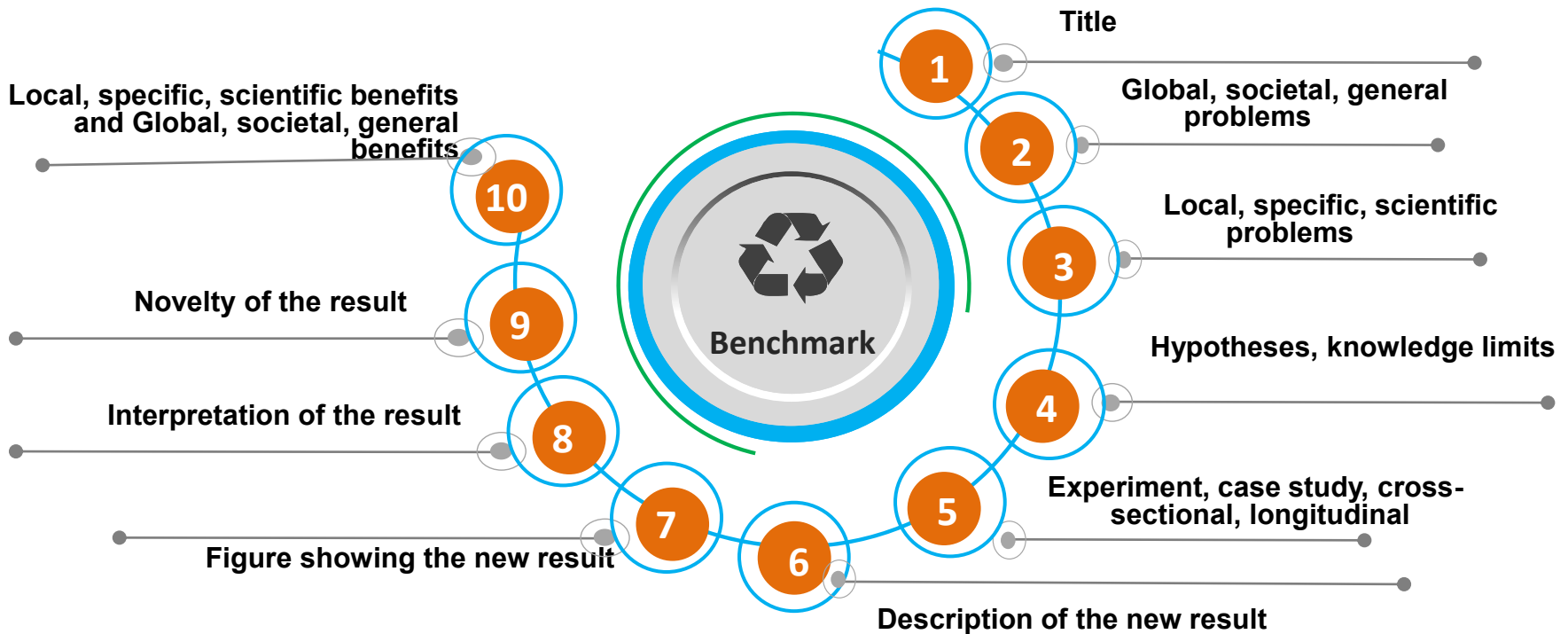
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<http://libguides.mit.edu/select-topic>

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Research Topic with Impact?

“Be aware that selecting a good topic may not be easy. It must be narrowed and focused enough to be interesting, yet broad enough to find adequate information. Before selecting your topic, make sure you know what your final project should look like. Each class or instructor will likely require a different format or style of research project.”

Elements of Scientific Micro Research



Think of the who, what, when, where and why questions

- WHY did you choose the topic? What interests you about it? Do you have an opinion about the issues involved?
- WHO are the information providers on this topic? Who might publish information about it? Who is affected by the topic? Do you know of organizations or institutions affiliated with the topic?
- WHAT are the major questions for this topic? Is there a debate about the topic? Are there a range of issues and viewpoints to consider?
- WHERE is your topic important: at the local, national or international level? Are there specific places affected by the topic?
- WHEN is/was your topic important? Is it a current event or an historical issue? Do you want to compare your topic by time periods?

Start with Breadth

- **Start with Breadth**

- Take a course in an area of interest early on in your graduate program
 - If you cannot take the course for credit, consider sitting in
- Attend ALL of the colloquium talks you see scheduled in the department
 - You may not understand all of them, but the exposure is invaluable
- Read survey papers in some areas of interest
- Attend a nearby conference
 - Conferences often offer reduced registration rates to students
- Talk to faculty members in the area
 - Faculty usually aren't difficult to talk to once you find them!

Develop Some Depth

- **Develop Some Depth**

- Conduct a literature search
- Discover latest research in recent conferences
 - Social Sciences Conferences
 - Social Sciences Journals such as Science Direct, Emerald, Elsevier, and others
- Find papers in Google scholar – then follow citations links
 - Read a research paper each day and summarize it
- Write an annotation for an annotated bibliography
 - There are tools to help you manage research papers
 - Mendeley
 - Zotero
- How to review a research paper?
 - The Task of the Referee, Adam J Smith, 1990
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.108.2376>

Define a Research Topic

- **Define a Research Topic**

[George H. Heilmeier](#) (1970 – 1975) developed a set of questions, which are relevant and necessary for a new research to answer. These questions are:

- What are you trying to do? Articulate your objectives using absolutely no jargon.
- What is the problem?
- Why is it hard?
- How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?
- What is new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?
- Who cares?

- Cf. The “Heilmeier Catechism” <https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/heilmeier-catechism>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_H._Heilmeier;
http://www.design.caltech.edu/erik/Misc/Heilmeier_Questions.html

Define a Research Topic continued

- **Define a Research Topic continued**

- If you are successful, what difference will it make?

What impact will success have?

How will it be measured?

- What are the risks and the payoffs?

- How much will it cost?

- How long will it take?

- What are the midterm and final "exams" to check for success?

How will progress be measured?

- cf. The "Heilmeier Catechism" <https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/heilmeier-catechism>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_H._Heilmeier;
http://www.design.caltech.edu/erik/Misc/Heilmeier_Questions.html

Define a Research Topic - Refined

- **Define a Research Topic - Refined**

When you can answer the following questions, you are ready to conduct research that leads to an impactful paper

- What problem do you want to solve?
- Who cares about this problem and why?
- What have others done to solve this problem and why is that inadequate?
- What is your proposed solution to this problem?
- What is new about your approach?
- Who will care if you succeed?
- How long will it take?
- How can you demonstrate that this is a good solution?
 - Source: Seamons, K, & Spafford, G. How to choose a research topic? spaf.cerias.purdue.edu/StudentInfo/How2.pdf

General Sources

- **CQ Researcher**
Great background material for current events and controversial topics
- **General Reference Research Guide**
Sources to help find general background information (includes dictionaries and encyclopedias).
- **Librarians' Internet Index**
A database of quality web sites designed by librarians. Arranged by topic and searchable by keyword or subject. Great starting point for background reading.
- **Oxford English Dictionary**
Online version of the comprehensive OED
- **Virtual Reference Collection**
A collection of web sites, organized by category, for finding facts, data and general information.

Subject-Specific Sources

- **Access Science**
- Online version of McGraw-Hill's Encyclopedia of Science and Technology and Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms
- **ASM Handbooks Online**
- Complete content of twenty-one ASM Handbook volumes plus two ASM Desk Editions
- **Biography Research Guide**
- Links to many biographical sources that cover various fields, including the Arts, Science, and History
- **Gale Virtual Reference Library**
- A collection of specialized online encyclopedias

Subject-Specific Sources cont'd

- **Knovel: Engineering & Scientific Handbooks**

Search for scientific & engineering information via an extensive collection of engineering & scientific e-books. Includes interactive tables & graphs.

- **CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics**

Comprehensive resource of physical constants and properties

- **Oxford Reference Online**

Online dictionaries from many different fields

- **ReferenceUSA**

Searchable directory of millions of public and private U.S. and international companies

Narrowing the Scope of your Topic

Too much information? Make your results list more manageable. Less, but more relevant, information is key. Consider these options when narrowing the scope of your paper:

- **Theoretical approach:**

Limit your topic to a particular approach to the issue.

- **Aspect or sub-area:**

Consider only one piece of the subject.

- **Time:**

Limit the time span you examine

- **Population group:**

Limit by age, sex, race, occupation, species or ethnic group.

- **Geographical location:**

A geographic analysis can provide a useful means to examine an issue.

Broadening the Scope of your Topic

Not finding enough information? Think of related ideas, or read some background information first. Consider reasons for insufficient information:

- **Your topic is too specific.** Generalize what you are looking for.
- **Your topic is too new** for anything substantive to have been written. If you are researching a recently breaking news event, you are likely to only find information about it in the news media. Otherwise, change topic.
- **You have not checked enough databases for information.** Use other databases in your subject area which might cover the topic from a different perspective
- **You are using less common words or too much jargon** to describe your topic. Use a thesaurus to find other terms to represent your topic. When reading background information, note how your topic is expressed in these materials. When you find citations in an article database, see how the topic is expressed by experts in the field..

What next?

Once you have a solid topic (i.e., research topic with impact), formulate your research question or hypothesis and begin finding information.

References

- [Seamons, K., & Purdue, G. \(\). How to choose a research topic?](#)
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- Rushami, Z. Y. (2012). *Research Methodology*
- Smith, D. C. (2003). The importance and challenges of being interesting. *Journal of the Academy of the Marketing Science*. Vol. 31, No. 3, p.319-322
- www.cabells.com (addresses, phone, e-mail and websites for a large number of journals as well as information on publication guidelines and review information)
- www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk (a general resource for academic writers, designed primarily with international students whose first language is not English in mind)
- <http://www.esrc.ac.uk> (impact toolkit)

Appreciation

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Thank You

Have a nice day

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