Exercise: how do you pick a topic?

You may find it helpful to consider the following when choosing a subject for your research project:

What are you interested in?

Remember, you will be doing a significant amount of independent study – that means you need to pick a subject area you will be motivated to research and write about without being forced to do so.

Having the discipline to work independently and meet self-imposed deadlines is as much about doing something you want to do as it is academic discipline.

Where do your academic strengths lie? Can you utilise these strengths in your research project?

For example, if you have a flair for creative writing you may choose to research a certain narrative style of writing or genre, and then produce your own short story in this style.

If you are particularly good at statistical analysis you may want to consider a research project which will give you access to sets of data and require you to produce an analysis of these.

What are you hoping to get out of undertaking this project?

Does this influence the topic of the research project and the approach you may take in any way? (e.g. if you are hoping that it will give you something to discuss at a university interview or to refer to in your personal statement you may pick an area related to the degree programme you’re considering).

Alternatively, if you’re interested in applying for a certain kind of work you may pick a topic which will give you a further insight into that sector interested in a certain line of work i.e. if you were interested in applying for work with a development charity you may research something about the impact of third sector organisations in the provision of malaria nets in a certain African country.

Exercise

You may like to capture your thoughts in the blank template - ‘Things to bear in mind when considering a topic’ which is available to download in either Microsoft Word or PDF formats from the bottom of the page.

Do share your experience in the comments below. Don’t forget to look at other learners’ comments. If you can relate to a comment someone else has made, why not ‘Like’ it or leave a reply?

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