

Ways to narrow a subject to a topic

Subdividing your subject

Many subjects can be divided into smaller pieces. One way to subdivide a subject is to ask questions sparked by reading or talking to your classmates. If you are writing about teen pregnancy, for example, you might wonder why some cities have different rates of teen pregnancy. Or you might ask whether high schools should provide child care for teen mothers. Either question would give you a manageable topic for a short paper.

Restricting your purpose

Often you can restrict your purpose. For example, if your subject is preventing teen pregnancy, you might at first hope to call readers to action. Upon further reflection, you might realize that this goal is more than you could hope to accomplish, given your word limit. By adopting a more limited purpose — to show that an experimental health class targeted at sixth graders results in lower rates of teen pregnancy or to argue for more funding for educational programs — you would have a manageable topic and a better chance of success.

Restricting your audience

Consider writing for a particular audience. For example, instead of writing for a general audience on a broad subject such as teenage pregnancy, you might address groups with a special interest in the subject: young people, parents, educators, or politicians.

Considering the information available to you

Look at the information you have collected. If you have gathered a great deal of information on one aspect of your subject (for example, counseling programs for pregnant teenagers) and less information on other aspects (such as birth control education or the rights of teen fathers), you may have found your topic.