# Research Topic Template

Using this template, you will write your first draft of the research topic you would like to develop into a dissertation topic. The template will guide you step by step in doing so. If you have questions about using the template, feel free to contact your faculty instructor in the colloquium courseroom.

#### Step 1: Starting Out—Getting It on Paper

In each of the spaces below, write the elements of your research topic as directed. Before starting, review your notes about the characteristics of a successful research topic and how to evaluate them from the presentation, *Creating a Successful Research Topic Statement*. You will remember that a successful research topic:

* Names the key concepts to be investigated.
* Describes the relationship (if any) between them.
* Identifies the target population of interest.
* Is sufficiently narrow and focused to permit research.
* Is a phrase, not a complete sentence.
	1. *What are the key concepts you wish to investigate? Use terminology appropriate to your specialization and discipline*.

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* 1. *What are the relationships (if any) that you want to explore between or among your key concepts?*

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* 1. *What is your target population? Be as specific and descriptive as you can.*

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* 1. *Good work. Now, combine all three elements into a single phrase. Write it as carefully as you can and do not hesitate to rewrite it as often as needed. Your phrase should be clear, well-worded, and articulate the topic statement.*

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#### Step 2: Narrowing and Focusing the Topic

You will recall the exercise we reviewed in the presentation, *Creating a Successful Research Topic Statement*, for narrowing and focusing the key concepts and the population in your topic statement. Here you will use the same exercise to narrow your topic’s key concepts and population at least four times. A helpful resource for this exercise is keyword searching. You can refresh your memory about this very effective searching technique by reviewing the presentation [*Keyword Searching*](http://www.capella.edu/interactivemedia/library/interactive/keywordSearching/keywordSearching_wrapper.asp).

As you try to focus your concepts more tightly, using keyword searching or subject searching in the library databases will help you find alternative concept words. For instance, if you search on a key concept term such as “management,” finding an article on management will also provide you some new keywords used by that author or journal.

Please realize that once you get deeply into the literature and begin doing the multiple searches you will ultimately carry out, your key concepts will become increasingly focused and powerful. You may easily change them many more than four times, as you grow toward mastery of your topical and methodological literature. For now, four iterations of the exercise will get you to a fairly focused place, and will prepare you for your initial literature searches.

Follow the instructions below; complete the steps in sequential order.

**Analysis, Findings, Discussion, and Ethics**

1. Enter the first concept from your research topic in 1.4 in the first left-hand cell of the grid. Enter the second key concept below it in the second cell. Continue entering all your key concepts (if you need additional rows, click in the last cell and then press the Tab key to add new rows).
2. For each concept, fill in the second column with a narrower term for that concept. Ask yourself what you mean by the broad term, and try to find a term that is more focused. For example, if your concept is *learning*, do you mean *rote learning* (learning by memorization) or *adaptation* (learning by trial-and-error) or some specific kind such as learning to read or learning to drive a car? If a concept is educational instruction, do you mean a level of instruction (such as high school), a modality of instruction (such as lecture or audiovisual), or some particular approach to instruction (such as experiential learning). Do not rush yourself. Keep reflecting on what you really mean and want to know. Push yourself to be as specific as possible.
3. Move to the third column when you are satisfied with the second column. For this iteration, we recommend that you visit the library. Start searching in your school’s databases using the terms in the second column. Do not link them; just search as broadly as you can on the single term. For instance, if in the second column your key concept is now *experiential learning*, search just on that term, and look for keywords or subjects. This will probably provide you with a number of new terms from the literature, and you can browse them and decide which term will allow you to further focus and narrow your key concept.
4. Lastly, when you are satisfied with the third column, go through the process a fourth time. Once again, use the library and search on the term in the third column. Here, you may want to make use of the database’s thesaurus or controlled vocabulary list. When you obtain a variety of new terms, reflect carefully on them. Choose the term that both takes you where you want to go and clearly expresses the key concept that you wish to investigate.
5. Enter the Target Population in the “2.5 Target Population” rows.

**Refining Key Concepts**

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| **Step 2.1****Broad Term** | **Step 2.2****Narrow** | **Step 2.3****More Narrow** | **Step 2.4****Most Narrow** |
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| **2.5 Target Population** |
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#### Step 3: Writing the New Research Topic

In the space below, write—as a single phrase—your research topic, using the words in the fourth column. Leave out extra words, omit any verbs (unless they are key concepts), and use no modifiers. Work to craft a clean, concise, and very clear phrase. Even if it is in quite specific terminology used by your discipline, it should be immediately understandable to a member of your specialization.

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#### Step 4: Sharing it with your Colleagues

When you are satisfied with your new research topic statement, complete these last steps:

1. Save your completed template to your hard drive. (Tip: create a folder on your computer that is specifically for your course work; this makes it easy for you to find your documents later.)
2. Complete the Self-Assessment: Research Topic assignment, found in the Colloquium courseroom.
3. Follow the discussion instructions to complete the Research Topic Critique discussion. This includes making two response postings to your colleagues.

Be sure to keep your topic handy. You will be working a great deal with it in the weeks and months—and years—ahead. Congratulations on having made a significant start toward a successful dissertation!