Hello, and welcome to the Evans Library Conducting Research series. In this module, we will discuss how to define your research topic.
Defining your topic will help clarify your research focus, identify the main concepts and keywords to use in your research, and give direction to both your searches and your writing.
The Four Steps:

1. State your topic as a question.
2. Identify main concepts.
4. Consider narrowing or broadening.

Here are the four steps that will help you define your topic and focus your research. We will talk about each of these in this tutorial.

First, state your topic as a question.

Next, identify the main concepts in your questions.

Then, brainstorm keywords, using a concept map to help you visualize connections.

And last, consider narrowing or broadening your topic if necessary, to fit the assignment.
1. State your topic as a question.

**TOPIC:**

climate change

- What are the effects of climate change?
- What is the impact of climate change on the environment?
- What are the social and economic implications of climate change?

A good way to begin defining your topic is to state your topic as a question.

For example, if your topic is “climate change,” you might ask, What are the effects of climate change, or What is the impact of climate change on the environment, or What are the social and economic implications of climate change.
Now that you have some more specific ideas, you can identify the main concepts in your questions. Highlight the important words.

2. Identify the main concepts.

- What are the **effects** of **climate change**?
- What is the **impact** of climate change on the **environment**?
- What are the major **social** and **economic implications** of climate change?

- Synonyms – thesaurus
- Related terms – dictionaries
- Similar ideas – encyclopedias or handbooks

Now, begin with those main concepts, and generate lists of synonyms, related terms, and similar concepts.

You can often find fresh ideas in a reference resource like a thesaurus, dictionary, encyclopedia, or handbook.
3. Create a concept map.

A concept map is a way to visually display your ideas and the relationships among them.

Concept maps are a visual display of your ideas and the relationships among them. They help clarify what you already know, but also get you thinking about your research in new ways.
Here is a sample concept map that shows the synonyms, related terms, and similar concepts on the “climate change” topic.

You may now be ready to begin your research using the terms that you have identified.

However...
4. Narrow or broaden the topic.

• What are the effects of climate change on farming? (narrower)
• What is the impact of climate change on Florida’s environment? (narrower)
• What are the social and economic global implications of climate change? (broader)

If you are having trouble fitting all of your ideas within the scope of the assignment, consider narrowing your research topic. Limiting to the effects of climate change on farming is more specific, as is the impact of climate change on Florida’s environment instead of the environment in general.

On the other hand, if your thoughts on your chosen topic don’t satisfy the requirements, try broadening your research topic. Global implications encompass more ideas than just social and economic implications.
We hope that this session has been helpful to you. Please remember to ask a librarian for help with defining your research topic.