

Brainstorming Tips

Make It Mean Something

Pick topics that are relevant to your life. This will help keep you from getting bored with your topic.

Make It Timely

Old issues have already been discussed and you will end up more than likely regurgitating what others have said. Instead of looking backwards at what has happened, look forward to implications from what is happening now.

Make It Debatable, or At Least Open to Interpretation

Picking a topic with an easy answer leaves you little to write about

Ex: The health effects of smoking

»Most of the general public knows about this. On the other hand, discussing a new way to stop smoking might be more interesting.

Make It Small

Huge or broad subjects can be overwhelming.

Ex: Abortion, the death penalty, global warming

»All of these issues are very large. Try looking a specific aspect, such as what one company is doing to try and prevent global warming.

Make It Deep

Go in depth with your topic. Don't just skim the surface, but get down to the real meat of the issue. This is a wonderful opportunity to show you can discuss something at a college level.

Ideas by Paper Type

For Narratives

- Make a list of 10 ways you define yourself. Then, for each characteristic, list events or memories that explain why you are that way.
- Draw a timeline of your life: what are the important events?
- Pretend interview yourself: what would you find interesting about you?
- Draw your house. What rooms or items can you recall the most detail about? Are there any stories connected to those objects or rooms?
- Who has had the biggest influence on your life, and why?
- What are your passions in life and why did they become your passions?
- Remember the extreme emotions: when were you the happiest? Saddest? Angriest? Most Scared?

For Research Papers

- Check out a variety of news sites (npr.org, news.google.com, cnn.com, news.bbc.co.uk and, if you're interested in local news, MLIVE.com) and explore the headlines or articles that grab your attention.
- Use GVSU's databases, such as Infotrac, Academic Search Premier, and Lexus Nexus, to type in keywords and see what pops up.
- Do you have a question that you always wanted to know the answer to? For example: Why do I have to take WRT 150? Why does GVSU charge so much for parking? These types of questions are fair game for research paper topics!
- Fill in the blank: "Why do we need _____" or "Why DON'T we need _____"?

- › Have a conversation (with a consultant, a friend, whomever!) about your life—maybe there are some researchable details to focus on (Did you grow up in a single parent family? Not play any sports as a child? Win a piano competition?).

For Profiles of People or Places

- › Make a timeline of the person's life and focus your paper around what you feel are the most crucial events.
- › Zoom in on details, then show some meaning. For example: Why does this person always wear a particular brand or style? Why does he or she speak in a certain way?
- › Write “a typical day in the life of _____” (fill in person or place).
- › Remember that the paper doesn't have to be positive. It could center on finding the real “truth” about a situation or even its negative aspects.
- › Personify the place: give it characteristics, a personality, a “face.”
- › Show the CHANGE in a person or place.
- › Define the person or place by what it is NOT.

Response/Argument

- › Think about this: What makes you angry?
- › Make outline of a piece of writing and its points. Do you agree/disagree them?
- › What's your favorite or most hated part of the piece?
- › Remember you can make an argument local! Take a look at a newspaper for ideas.
- › Think about what's debated in your major area.
- › Write down issues other people feel strongly about—which you can explore.
- › “Argue within the argument”: ask yourself “Why?” after giving your reasons.
- › Play the perspective game—try to argue from someone else's perspective.

For more information:

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/topic.shtml