

General Subject: Writing a Research Paper

Students will write an extended research paper based on a topic or theme that comes from the reading of *Black Boy*. In order to begin the research, students must select a research topic and then they must develop and narrow the topic. This stage of the research is important and requires the student's thinking and decision-making, as they will deal with the topic throughout the research and writing of the paper.

How to Narrow Your Research Topic

Example: I'm thinking of doing a paper on "fashion." This topic could develop in many different ways.

Ask Yourself Questions About Your Topic:

- What do you know about it? What don't you know?
- What aspects of your topic interest you: historical, sociological, psychological, etc.?
- What time period do you want to cover?
- On what geographic region do you want to focus?
- What kind of information do you need?
 - a brief summary or a lengthy explanation?
 - periodical articles, books, essays, encyclopedia articles?
 - statistics?

Topic Narrowing Example:

General Topic: fashion

Time span: 1920s

Place: US; urban; big cities (not rural)

Person or group: youth; college age

Event or Aspects: sexual attitudes; behavior; sociological

Narrowed Topic Sentence: What did American youth fashion of the 1920s say about sexual mores (morals)?

DIRECTIONS FOR TOPIC NARROWING (Complete these steps.)

- 1) Think about the reading and think about topics and themes.
- 2) Select a temporary topic.
- 3) Go to the three internet databases and explore the topic. Determine if it is the topic you want to research and/or if there is enough current information on the topic.
- 4) PICK YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC.
- 5) Stop. **In a separate formal written assignment, answer all the questions listed above under "Ask Yourself Questions About Your Topic."** Answer thoughtfully and completely. YOU WILL NEED TO DO MORE EXPLORATION OF THE DATABASES TO NARROW YOUR TOPIC.
- 6) Complete your narrowed topic sentence for approval. You must have a specific research topic sentence before you can begin gathering information for your research project.

How Do I Develop Questions About My Topic After I Select It?

As you get into your material, some questions come naturally -- Who? What? Why?

There are different kinds of questions:

Fact questions -- When did Robinson Jeffers move to the Monterey peninsula? What other writers lived in this general area?

Hypothetical questions -- What if Robinson Jeffers hadn't moved to Carmel? Would his poetry have been different?

Probing questions -- In what ways did living on the California Central Coast in the early 20th century influence the poetry that emerged from Robinson Jeffers and others who wrote in this area?

Contrasting questions -- Is Jeffers' poetry more or less influenced by the Central Coast environment than the poetry of others who wrote in this general region, e.g., Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry Miller?