

When it comes to things like freight trains, diesel engines, and long-distance runners, momentum is the key.



The hardest part is getting started.

This is also true for choosing a topic for an A+ essay topic.

Some topics seem great at first, but once you start writing they fizzle out. You discover that your topic is too narrow, or too broad, or you simply lose interest, and your idea for an A+ essay topic has gone flat.

It's an easy problem to avoid, however. Here are a few ideas to help you choose the perfect topic.

Figure Out What Really Gets to You

What interests you most about the class you're taking? What grabs your attention?

Maybe you disagree with something and want to argue the opposite. Topics that make you angry have promise.

When it comes to choosing an A+ essay topic, you can also think about what puzzles you or makes you curious. Investigating a topic you're intrigued by can feel like an adventure.

The key is to look for topics that stir up emotion. Emotionally rich topics are more interesting to work with, and are more likely to help you write an A+ essay topic.

Keep A Running List of "Out of the Blue" Ideas

There's a reason famous songwriters keep a notebook in every room. When inspiration hits, they want to be ready for it.

You can do the same when you're in an essay-oriented class. As ideas come to you, jot them down or type them into your smartphone. This way you'll have a running list of topic ideas from which to choose that A+ essay topic.

You can find inspiration from the lectures or readings. As with songwriters, you might find that a conversation or even a phrase can spark an internal dialog. Nurture these sparks and be ready for inspiration to flow.

Check in with your professor



It's easy to spend hours writing, only to realize that your idea didn't pan out. It's either too narrow or too broad, you can't find the evidence you need to support it. There's a simple way to avoid this, and to improve your essay at the same time: Check in with your professor. Your prof has seen hundreds of essays, and knows the field well. She can tell which topics are likely to be an A+ essay topic, and which are likely to lead to a dead end. Part of your job as a student is to ask. Once you have a few ideas, drop into her office hours and start a conversation. You'll leave that 10 minute conversation with a clearer topic and some resources to help you build your argument.

Turn your A+ essay topic into a thesis

Once you have your topic, turn it into a thesis. The difference: a topic is an idea, while a thesis has a point of view. A thesis always makes an argument, or takes a stand.

Check out this example from a Freshman Seminar:

Topic 1: The relationship between people, plants, and animals before and after food domestication during the Neolithic Period.

Thesis 1: Food domestication during the Neolithic Period altered the fundamental relationship between humans, plants, and animals from one of partnership to one of ownership, which led to a restructuring of the social order that left many people worse off.

Here's another from a college History class:

Topic 2: American policy during the Vietnam War

Thesis 2: American policy in the Vietnam War was driven by overarching assumptions about America's role in the post WWII world order and Cold War. American officials believed in a world in which American values of democracy and capitalism were under attack from an aggressive, expansionist communism. These assumptions caused American leadership to consistently misinterpret events across the globe. [Written by J.M., college sophomore]

Topics are general; theses present a specific point of view. (More on How to Write a Thesis in a future post.)

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Finding an A+ essay topic can make the difference between last-minute panic and enjoying your Humanities and Social Science classes but using these strategies:

1. Look for emotion — anger, excitement, curiosity
2. Keep a running list of ideas
3. Have short, frequent conversations with your prof
4. Change your topic idea into a powerful, persuasive thesis

These strategies will help you get started early, give you the momentum you need to make essay writing a joy.