

Questions to focus your writing topic

Have you ever been stuck for what to write in a paper? Maybe you're not sure where to start the paper, or maybe one section of the paper seems to lack enough content or support. The following questions will help you consider other angles to take, or some fresh ways to develop ideas you already have.

Can you describe something related to a possible topic or idea?

- What is it? Who is/was involved? Where? When? How? How long?
- Can you use your senses to describe it? What does it look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, taste like?
- What details can you add? (specific names, places, dates, numbers)

How can you divide it into pieces?

- What are several components or parts that make up your topic?
- Can you divide your topic into a variety of types, kinds, or categories?
- What are some of the different sides, ways of seeing, perspectives or points of view?
- What are the relationships between your different categories or pieces?
- How do they interact with each other?
- How do they function together?

How is something the same or different from something else?

- Can you think of another thing, event, person, or concept that is either similar to or different from your topic?
- What is similar? How is it similar? In what ways is it similar? How is it different? In what ways is it different?

How did something change over time?

- What are the steps in the process?
- What is the story from beginning to end?
- How did it develop, grow, improve, deteriorate, or stay the same over time?

Are there other opinions or positions about this topic?

- Who would disagree with you about your topic or argument?
- What different opinions or positions do people have on this topic?
- Why would these people disagree?
- What reasons would they give to argue their position?
- What arguments would you make back?

What were the causes and effects?

- How did something happen or why did it happen? What were causes or reasons?
- Where did something come from or how did it start?
- What motivated the outcome? What were people's motivations to act in a certain way?
- What happened as a result?
- What were important consequences or results?
- Who or what is affected in negative or positive ways?
- What are the implications or possible good or bad outcomes?
- What was the chain reaction of causes and effects?
- Did some results or effects in turn cause other things to happen?
- Were some causes/reasons the result of something else?

What patterns can you see?

- What repeats several times?
- What theme keeps coming up over and over?