Tip #1 Brainstorm research ideas and identify keywords

1. Write down your topic or question.
2. Circle the main concepts.
3. For each concept, list questions or keywords, such as synonyms, examples, and other ways of describing the concept.
4. From here, start to develop research questions.

Tip #2  Search the literature to narrow and focus your topic

To narrow your topic, ask questions:

i. What do you know about it? What don't you know? What are the “gaps” in the research?
ii. Consider context to look at particulars or examples to help narrow.
   1. Sociological aspects: Attitudes, identity, categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality.
   2. Time period?
   3. Geography?
   4. What groups of people?

To broaden your topic, consider the context. Try to articulate the bigger conversation(s).
Tip #3  Imagine yourself joining the scholarly “conversation”
Tip #4  Read widely, read actively, and interrogate your sources

Ask yourself:

- What questions is the author trying to answer?
- What theories are they informed by?
- What data/methods did they use?
- What did they find?
Tip #5  Good sources often lead to other good sources

Use a source’s keywords, questions, and bibliography to find other useful sources.

Take note of:

- “Keywords” used in sources and subject terms assigned in library databases
- References in bibliographies that seem interesting or relevant
- Key authors