Topic Selection & Refinement

If your teacher has not already assigned you a topic, you might want to consider using the following steps in choosing and refining your topic.

- **Brainstorming:** Write ideas down on paper as they pop into your mind. Use your friends and your teacher if you get stuck.

- **Clustering:** Develop your ideas by writing all potential ideas and subtopics about a particular subject.

- **Questioning:** Write a list of questions about the subject. Begin the questions with *who, what, where, when, why,* or *how.*

- **Check tables of contents, indexes, and subject directories for ideas and subtopic ideas.** Mrs. Taggart can point these out for you.

**Evaluating Your Topic**

- The topic should be of interest to you. Writing about a topic is so much more stimulating if it is something you want to know more about.

- Can the topic be covered by sources that are readily available to you? Check your school/public libraries and online resources to make sure there is enough information available on your topic.

- Ask yourself if the topic is significant to you and the class you will be writing it for. If you are not sure, check with your teacher.

- Is your topic too broad or too narrow? (see topic refinement below) Consider if you can adequately cover your topic in the number of pages your teacher has assigned you.

- Is the topic objective? Make sure that you can support your topic with facts.

- Is your topic just repeating what you found in your research or have you developed your paper around an interesting thesis, claim or theme?
Refining Your Topic
3 Examples of limiting a topic

1. Too Broad>
   "Egypt"
   "Ernest Hemingway"
   "Living Organisms"

2. Fair>
   "Egyptian Customs"
   "Hemingway's Philosophy of Life"
   "Chemistry of the Human Body"

3. Better>
   "Burial of the Dead Among Egyptians"
   "Hemingway's Attitude Towards Death in his Novels"
   "Chemical Theory of Disease"

4. Best>
   "Influence of Nile River on Customs of Burying the Dead"
   "Hemingway's Attitude Towards Death Contrasted in Sun Also Rises and For Whom the Bell Tolls"
   "How Chemistry Affects the Sinuses"

Choose Your Approach

**Contrasting**: show differences>
"Farm life in Kentucky before and after 1800"

**Tracing**: to show development>
"Loss of parental authority since WWII"

**Criticizing**: to disprove something>
"Why smoking does not necessarily cause lung cancer."

**Linking**: to show associations between>
"The ambulance service affected elements heretofore disregarded Hemingway's Plots."

**Identifying**: proving an idea exists which>
"The theme of "Man Defeated" in Jason Howard's poems has been disregarded"