

Narrowing a Topic

Think about what makes a topic controversial. For example, below are some controversial questions about smoking:

1. Should smokers have unlimited rights to smoke in public, or should they have to limit smoking to designated places?
2. Are smoking bans a violation of smokers' civil rights or a preservation of the rights of non smokers?
3. Is smoking unhealthy, or does it have health benefits that outweigh its harmful effects?
4. Do cigarette ads cause people to start smoking, or do other factors affect whether or not people start smoking?

Choosing Keywords

Do **NOT** use a search like this one to find pro/con materials:

BAD Keyword Search!
smokers rights and pro and con

Authors rarely present their arguments this way. Choose keywords according to what IS controversial about your topic. For example, civil rights for smokers and non-smokers are the main issue in topic #2 above. Keyword choice should reflect these issues:

GOOD Keyword Searches!
smoker* and ban* and civil right*
(non smoker* or nonsmoker*) and civil right*
smoker* and right*

NOTE: Try several different keywords to find articles reflecting all viewpoints.

A Few More Tips

- Many topics are controversial because of moral or ethical implications. Try a keyword search using these terms. **Example:** assisted suicide and (moral* or ethic*)
- Consult a reference book on your topic, such as *Cancer Sourcebook: basic consumer health information about major forms and stages of cancer...*
- Consult a book from the *Opposing Viewpoints* series on your topic (see back for more information on *Opposing Viewpoints*).

Find this handout and others at <http://library.uco.edu/handouts>
Have questions? Ask Us! 974-2878 or <http://library.uco.edu/ask>

Resources for Pro/Con Material

American Civil Liberties Union

<http://www.aclu.org/>

The ACLU's mission is to "defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country by the Constitution and the laws of the United States."

Best Information on the Net (BIOTN) > Hot Paper Topics

<http://library.sau.edu/bestinfo/Hot/hotindex.htm>

Site created and maintained by St Ambrose University Library, Davenport, IA. Highly respected directory of websites, collected by St. Ambrose librarian.

CQ Researcher -- Available electronically at

<http://library.uco.edu/databases/> by selecting the "CQ Researcher Global" link.

Reference H35.E35 – Through 2005; 4th Floor South H35.E 35 – Older issues. Contains background information on many current events topics.

National Issues.Com -- <http://www.nifi.org/>

Nonpartisan group collecting information about current political and social Issues.

Opposing Viewpoints book series

Various call numbers. Find by using library catalog; type "opposing viewpoints" in the search box and limit to title.

Various volumes on many current events topics. Includes articles with contrasting opinions.

Opposing Viewpoints Database -- Available electronically at

<http://library.uco.edu/databases/> by selecting the

"Opposing Viewpoints" link. Opposing Viewpoints is a source for information on social issues. Sections

include viewpoint articles, topic overviews, statistics, primary documents, links to websites, and full-text magazine and newspaper articles.

Public Agenda Online -- <http://publicagenda.org/>

Collects background information and views on many debated topics. "Issues" column is a good place to start.