The Art of Browsing

Browsing can be an effective way to narrow down your research topic. You might want to browse resources in the library, including its print materials. To locate a book, find its call number on the library website. The Harold B. Lee Library uses the Library of Congress cataloging system, which groups books by subject. It may be helpful for you to browse the section related to your topic for relevant materials. It may also be worthwhile to browse through a book itself. Look at the contents page or index to see what the book is about. Scan the introduction or conclusion to see major arguments the book makes or topics that it covers. Many academic books will even have a history or background section containing contextual information about its topic.

The library website houses great resources for browsing topic ideas. The Research Starter Guide is meant for those new to college or doing a general research paper. One resource it includes is Gale Virtual Reference Library, which has encyclopedias on many different issues and subjects. Another is Opposing Viewpoints in Context, a database that offers different source materials on highly discussed contemporary issues. Browsing through topic ideas is a great brainstorming technique to help you decide what to write about. Do it with a variety of sources, both print and online, and if you get stuck, feel free to visit the Research and Writing Center for a brainstorming consultation with one of our experienced research consultants.