The following activity is designed to help students explore possible topics for research. Since the activity focuses on the process of discovery, it is useful to do this exercise as a group activity so students can share ideas and knowledge about the respective issues.

The students break into small groups of four or five students and proceed with the activity as outlined below. After they have worked in groups for 20-25 minutes, the students then share their group’s responses, and the students generate a discussion around the respective issues.

**FINDING A FOCUS**

Argument has been defined as a form of persuasion that relies on reason. The main point of an argument is the defense of a position, but the strength of your argument is dependent upon the level of respect and knowledge you show to the opposing side. In other words, in order to have an informed argument, you must know both the pros and cons or positive and negative aspects of the issue.

Another important aspect to keep in mind about writing a research essay is that you are not simply structuring your research because you are building a position that is yours first and foremost; the research simply buttresses your argument and gives it credibility. Indeed, many arguments have no documented research, but a research paper always begins with an informed argument.

So, how do we begin?

**PRE-WRITING**

1) An argument always begins with a broad idea, concept, or topic that must be narrowed in order to make it manageable. For example, if I were interested in pursuing a topic about the environment, I would have to narrow that idea down—what particular issue about the environment do I want to discuss—because I could not possibly discuss everything.

2) Choose one of the following categories to discuss with your groups. Think about each of the questions in the categories, focusing on the positive or negative aspects for each of the topics.

3) Make a list of pros and cons. If you are unable to assess the pros and cons, how might you re-think the topic in terms of other issues that may need to be considered?
4) After you have discussed the pros and cons of the issue, try to think of other questions you have about the issue that you would like to see addressed in an essay that discusses the topic.

5) Try to think of a thesis statement that would state the position your argument would take. Remember, your thesis statement is your controlling idea or what you are trying to prove.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES
1) Is global warming a serious threat to the biosphere?
2) Should endangered species be protected?
3) Should SUV's be more strictly regulated?

COLLEGIATE SPORTS
1) Should student athletes be "paid to play?"
2) Should college athletes be required to complete a degree before "turning pro?"
3) Despite the efforts of Title IX, which attempted to ensure equal opportunity for both genders in sports, does gender discrimination still exist in collegiate sports?
4) Do NCAA rules need to be revised?

SOCIAL ISSUES
1) Do entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare need to be reformed?
2) Is the right to pray in the public school system protected by the First Amendment?
3) Does the U.S. need to implement a national health care policy?

OTHER POSSIBLE TOPICS
For the following topics, try to narrow the broad topics into more manageable topics. Next, try to generate a list of questions you would like to explore.
1) Religion
2) Animal Rights
3) Campaign Finance Reform
4) U.S. Foreign Policy