



# Researching your topic

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Student guide: Preparing for the Parliament Prize 2021

Parliament  
of Victoria  
Education

If you're keen to enter the Parliament Prize competition this year but you're not sure what your topic will be, or perhaps you're not yet sure what to say about the topic you've chosen, then it's time to do a little bit of research. Here are some research tips that might help you settle on your topic and develop a convincing message.

## Not sure what to talk about?

Sometimes the hardest part of a research task is knowing where to start. Perhaps there isn't anything in particular that you're passionate about, or perhaps your passionate about so many things that it's hard to choose. As a first step you can:

- Read the local newspaper (this might be online if you don't get a physical paper anymore), The Age and/or Herald Sun.
- Read the agendas/minutes from your local council meetings. These are readily accessible via your local council's website. The agenda will give you an overview of the topics, while the minutes will tell you what they discussed and any action they are taking, or decisions made
- Watch a range of news and current affair programs.

## How does this help?

Looking at a number of different sources of news can help to identify the sorts of issues people are talking about. Think about the people, ideas, stories or comments you remember.

- What stuck?
- What did you find interesting?
- Was there anything that made you mad or angry? Or perhaps you were upset by something? Or maybe you read or saw a feel-good story about someone or something?
- If you end up with too many ideas, see the questions below

## Too many ideas?

You only have 90-seconds, so focussing on a topic is important. If you're having trouble selecting the idea, the questions below might help:

- Why are these issues or topics important to you?
  - Is there a connection between the answers that you have given? If so, maybe you want to talk about the connection, for example environmental issues, and use one of the topics or issues as an example.
- How might the different topics or issues affect other people in the community?
  - You might select an issue or topic that has the biggest impact or a topic that doesn't affect many people, and therefore perhaps people won't know about it?
- Why might it be important to share this topic or issue with Parliament?

## Researching

You have 90-seconds to speak to Parliament. You've picked a topic that you're passionate about, something you find interesting and think that not only should everyone know about it, but that something should also be done about it. Now what?

Doing some research can help you work out what to say, what to focus on, what might have been tried in the past and give you some ideas about what could be done in the future.

## Figuring out what to research

There are so many different ways of approaching your research. Below are just a couple of strategies that might be useful to focus what you are looking for, especially if you are not sure where to start or don't have a lot of time.

## Generating questions

The question matrix provides some question starters that maybe useful to create different types of questions. Here are a few different ways you could use this:

- Pick your 5 question starters, write some questions you find interesting. Use these for your research.
- Use the question starters to brainstorm as many questions about your topic as you possibly can.
  - Write them all down
  - Choose your 2 favourites to start your research.
- Pick one question starter from each row.
  - Put these questions into an order you think makes sense and see if you can answer each of them in turn.
- Write a question on your topic using every box
  - Questions you know the answer to already, colour green. Try to write new questions in this box that you're not sure how to answer
  - Questions you're not sure how to answer, colour orange
  - For boxes where you can't think of a question, colour red
  - When you're doing your research, concentrate on answering the questions in the orange boxes.

| ?                  | Event       | Situation         | Choice       | Person     | Reason     | Means      |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Present</b>     | What is?    | Where/when is?    | Which is?    | Who is?    | Why is?    | How is?    |
| <b>Past</b>        | What did?   | Where/when did?   | Which did?   | Who did?   | Why did?   | How did?   |
| <b>Possibility</b> | What can?   | Where/when can?   | Which can?   | Who can?   | Why can?   | How can?   |
| <b>Probability</b> | What would? | Where/when would? | Which would? | Who would? | Why would? | How would? |
| <b>Prediction</b>  | What will?  | Where/when will?  | Which will?  | Who will?  | Why will?  | How will?  |
| <b>Imagination</b> | What might? | Where/when might? | Which might? | Who might? | Why might? | How might? |

Wiederhold, C.W. (2007). *Cooperative learning & higher-level thinking: the Q-matrix*. Heatherton, Vic. Hawker Brownlow Education

## Selecting credible sources

Checking who wrote what you're reading and why they wrote it is useful to make sure you're reading something that is credible (reliable). Below are some questions to help you think through your sources.

### Who wrote it?

- What is their background? What experiences might they have that makes them knowledgeable?

### What are the key points they are making?

- A great way to do this is to read a paragraph or a page, and then write down what you remember reading. This will help you to write down the different ideas in your own words. You can always go back and double check any dates, statistics, or any other facts.

### Where is it published?

- If it is on the internet, is it a reliable site. Things to look for:
  - https: - the 's' means the website is secure
  - .vic.gov.au – government website, including funded agencies
  - .asn – association
  - .org – organisation (but check to see who the organisation is)
  - .au – Australian website
- Is it a secondary source (re-published or shared by different people on different platforms) or is it the primary source (original)? Always try to find the original primary source where you can.
- Where are they getting their information from? If they use some evidence or quote someone, check out where they got the information from; are they using reliable sources?
- Books are often more reliable because they are usually checked multiple times before they are published, just check how old the information is.

### When?

- When was the article or website written?
  - If it was something that hasn't been updated in the last couple of years, is it the most up-to-date information that we have?

### Why are they writing this?

- What is the purpose of the article?
- Is the author being paid by outside organisations to write the article? Do they have sponsorships or advertising groups that have an interest in the topic?

### How many other sources say the same thing?

- Looking for multiple sources that have the same or similar information is useful. But make sure that they are reliable sources, otherwise you could be confirming the wrong or inaccurate information.

## Working out what to include

Sometimes when we do research, we can end up with too much information. You can use a table like the one below to help select which bits of the research you keep and what might keep for something else.

| Necessary to know | Good to know | Interesting to know | Not relevant for now |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|
|                   |              |                     |                      |

Researching can be frustrating if you can't find what you're looking for and take a lot of time if you find lots of information or new and interesting ideas. The different questions and tables above might be useful to help you focus on your topic.

## Ask for input

Once you have undertaken your research speak to a teacher, friend or family member about the research and information you have discovered. They might ask you questions which you may then need to follow up or learn more about.