

Name

The Research Paper

STEP 1 Choosing a Topic

There are thousands of possible topics to choose from for your research paper. How do you go about choosing the right one? First, it is important to know what a research paper is not.

A research paper *is not* a report. A report is just a collection of facts. For example, when you were in elementary school, your teacher might have asked you to do a report on a famous battle in the American Revolution. To complete this task, you first found information and facts in books and on the Internet. Next, you summarized the important facts and events into your own words and created a report. Your finished product, though exceptional of course, was nothing more than a collection of facts about an event. This is not a research paper.

A research paper *does* include facts and information, but it is much more than that. Your research paper is based on an argument that you are making about a topic. You are coming up with an argument and defending it with facts and information. Do you see the difference? A research paper is essentially a written defense of an opinion using facts as evidence to support your argument.

When choosing a topic, you should take into consideration the following:

- Your personal interest in the topic.
- The amount of learning about the topic you will have to do. If you decide to research a topic that is very scientific, be prepared to learn the science involved. I assure you that I will not be able to help explain scientific topics.
- Amount of information on the topic. If your topic is too specialized, it may be hard to find accessible information to research. Similarly, if the topic is too broad, there may be too much information to search through.

Now that we have discussed what a research paper is, it is time to think about possible topics. Make a random list of topics or ideas you may be interested in researching. You can ask parents, siblings, or friends if they have any suggestions. Think of things you are interested in or things happening in the news.

Below is an example brainstorm:

I am interested in:

- Education – is going to college worth the \$, being bilingual, studying abroad, urban education
- Traveling – experiencing other cultures, globalization
- Technology – addiction to technology, tech in education
- Crisis in Syria – dictatorship, chemical weapons, USA's responsibility
- Sports – coaching, college sports, professional athletes as role models
- Politics – useless Congress, Obamacare, national legislation

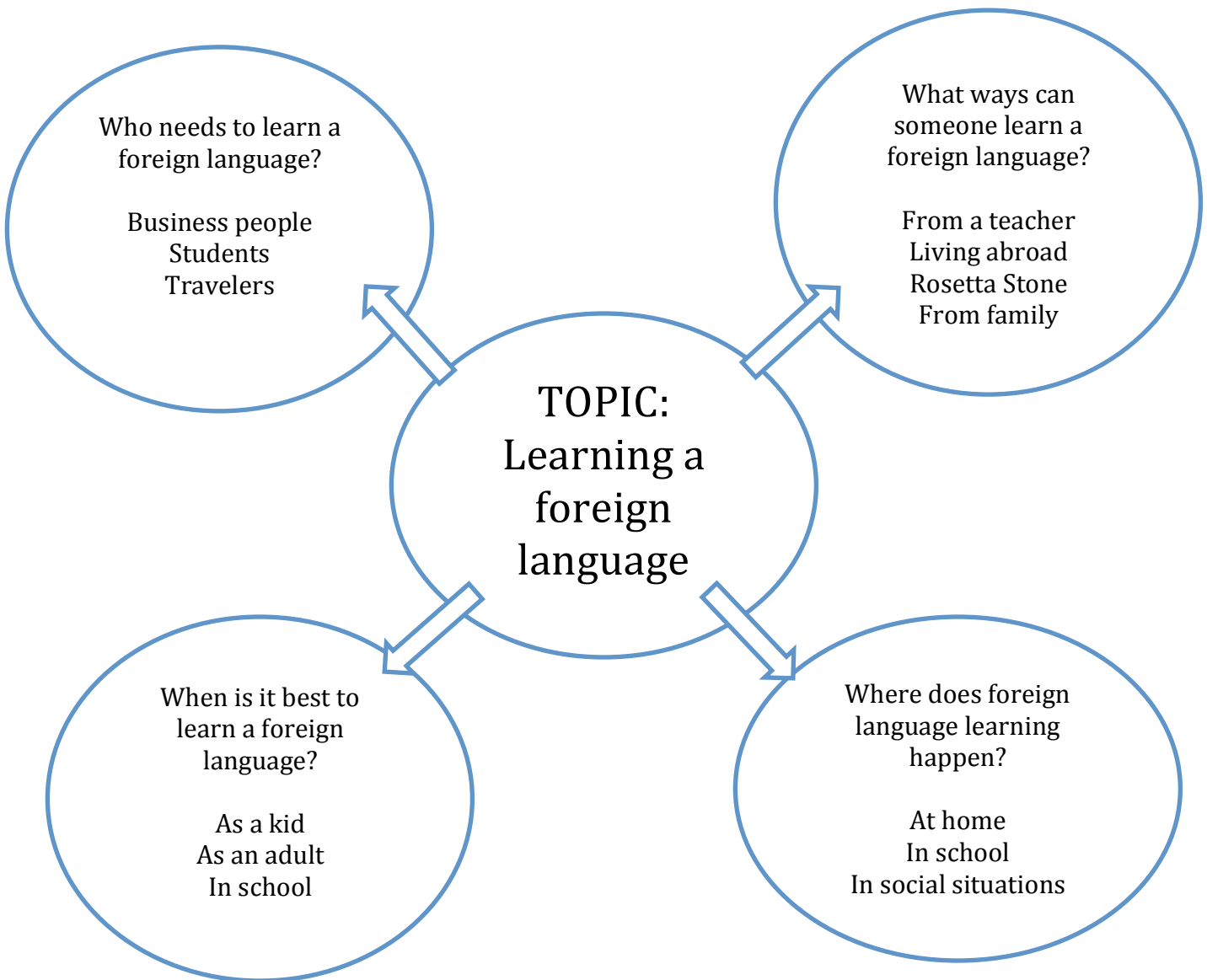
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STEP 2

Narrowing a Topic

After choosing a topic, it is important to narrow it down. If you do not narrow your topic down by asking specific questions, the writing process will be difficult. You may end up writing 20 pages because of the large amount of information, or you may write a very general, surface-level 4-page paper.

To narrow down your topic, create some WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE questions.



Narrowed Topics:

Learning a foreign language and age
Learning a foreign language and future educational/business opportunities.
Learning a foreign language and studying abroad vs. studying in home country

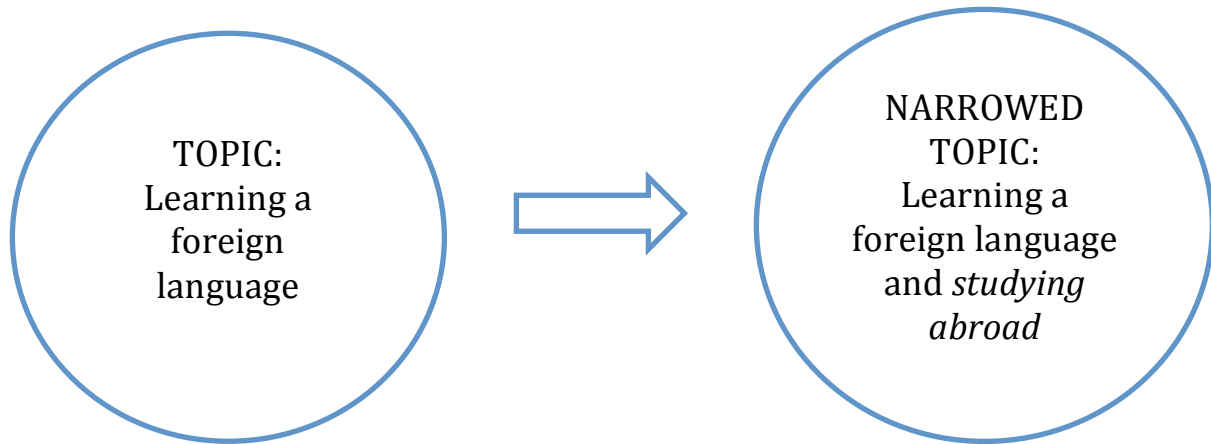
Do more reading and research about these specific topics until you find one that is interesting and has sufficient information

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STEP 3

Developing and Organizing your Research Ideas

Once your topic has been chosen, narrowed and approved, it is time to begin developing and organizing your ideas.



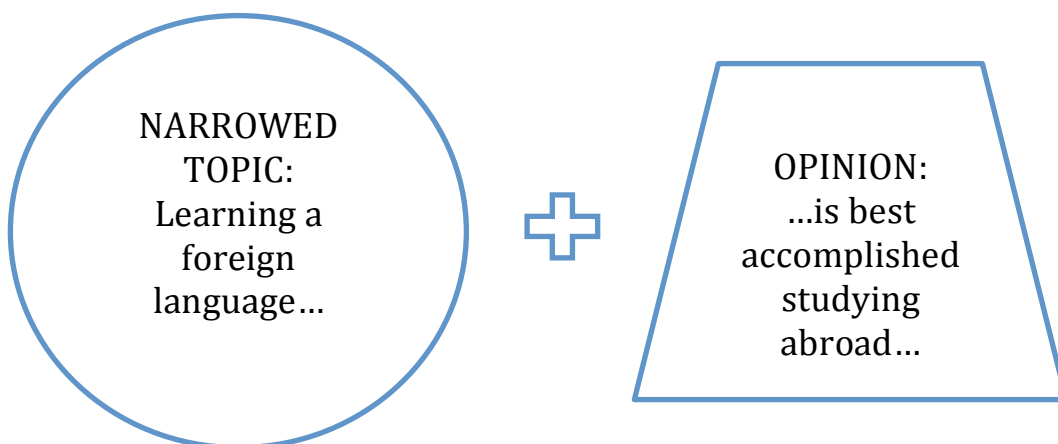
Begin forming opinion statements about your narrowed topic. These can be opinions you have read about in your exploratory research, or these can be opinions you have formed on the topic.

NARROWED TOPIC: Learning a foreign language and studying abroad.

OPINIONS:

- Learning a foreign language is best accomplished by studying abroad.
- Learning a foreign language is best accomplished by studying in one's home country.

The above opinions are two basic opinions about studying abroad. They are a good place to start and can be developed further later in the research process.



You now have two parts of the THESIS FORMULA completed, the TOPIC and the OPINION.

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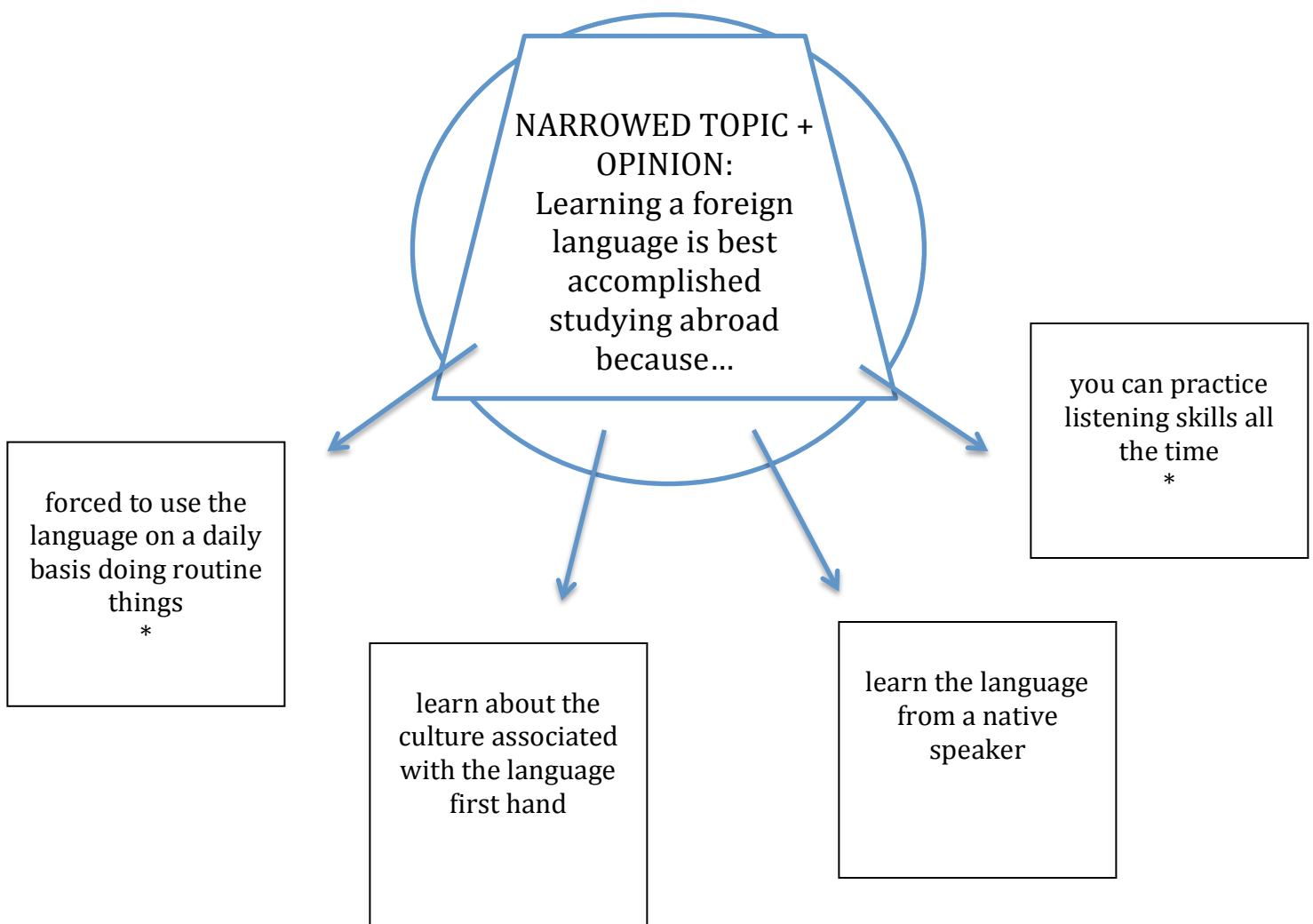
STEP 4

Getting the Research Under Control

Once you have the TOPIC and OPINION, you need to come up with the CONTROLLING IDEAS. Remember, the CONTROLLING IDEAS are the reasons you have for holding a certain opinion. Your CONTROLLING IDEAS answer the WHY question.

WHY is studying abroad best when learning a foreign language?

To formulate your CONTROLLING IDEAS, brainstorm ideas based on your own experience and ideas you have found in your research.

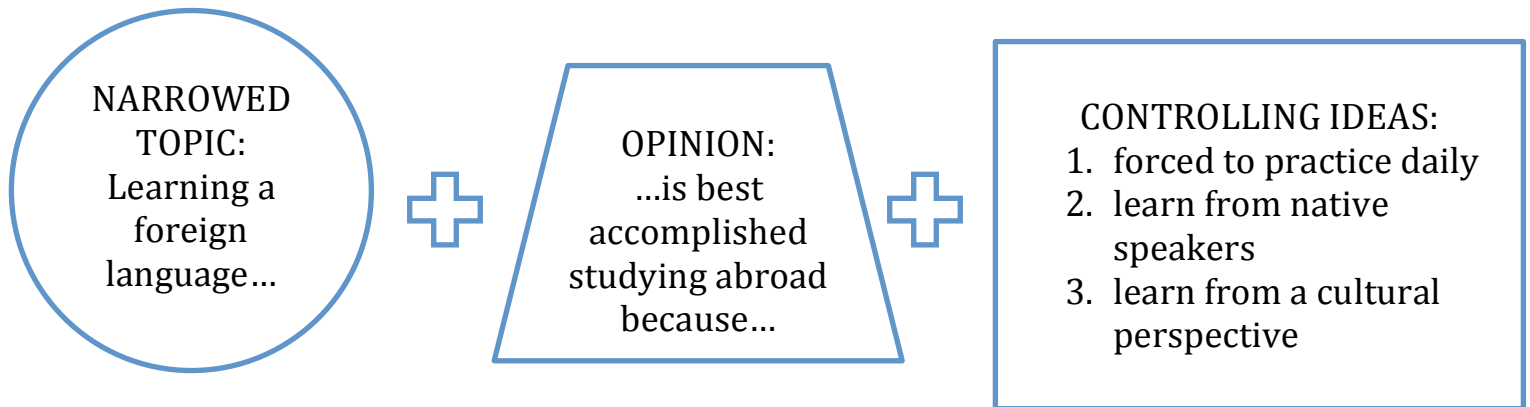


*After brainstorming ideas, try to narrow your possible controlling ideas to three independent controlling ideas. This might mean that you will have to combine some ideas that are similar. It is very important that your controlling ideas are not repetitive. If they are repetitive, then your paper will say the same things over and over again.

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STEP 5 Writing the Thesis Statement

Once you have your narrowed topic, your opinion, and your three independent controlling ideas, you are ready to write your THESIS STATEMENT.



Next, try writing your thesis statement as one complete, grammatically correct sentence.

- *Learning a foreign language is best accomplished studying abroad because students are forced to practice daily, will learn from native speakers, and will learn the language from a cultural perspective.*
- *Studying abroad is the best way to learn a second language because students are forced to practice daily, will learn from native speakers, and will learn the language from a cultural perspective.*
- *Being forced to practice daily, learning from native speakers and learning from a cultural perspective are all reasons why learning a foreign language is best accomplished by studying abroad.*

All of these thesis statements say the same thing*

Parallelism

When writing thesis statements, it is helpful to write the sentence so that it is parallel. A thesis statement is really a list of arguments that support an opinion. It is important that we list the arguments in parallel structure.

Take a look at these examples. Can you notice a pattern?

- Mr. Mock went to the store and bought **milk, eggs and bread**.
- Mr. Mock went to the store and bought *a gallon of* **milk**, *a carton of* **eggs** and *a loaf of* **bread**.
- Mr. Mock enjoys *spicy* **food**, *hot* **tea** and *cold* **pizza**.

Is the following sentence parallel? Rewrite it so that it has parallel structure.

Mr. Mock likes to ride his bike, watching TV and play soccer.

The following is a thesis statement that has terrible parallelism:

Learning a foreign language is best accomplished studying abroad because students are forced to practice daily, the idea that they will be learning from native speakers is good and because learning the language from a cultural perspective is very important.

Notice the differences when the thesis is written using parallel form:

*Learning a foreign language is best accomplished studying abroad because students **are forced** to practice daily, **will learn** from native speakers, and **will learn** the language from a cultural perspective.*