Refining Your Topic

April 14, 2017

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to. . .

* Identify how broad or narrow their topics are, and understand if it is a reasonable topic to tackle in an 8-10 page paper
* Use the tactics and steps from class to narrow their argument or focus
* Communicate with other students to narrow or broaden their topics and work together to solve problems.

**Materials**

* Notes
* PowerPoint/projector/computer
* Student Responsibility: knowledge of their own topics

**Outline (15 minutes)**

1. Review PowerPoint strategies to narrow your topic, with examples (10 min)
   1. How to know if it’s too broad
   2. Example from my 101 class
   3. Sample methods
   4. Ask for student contributions of methods/tips
   5. Ask for questions at the end
2. Work silently on your topic using your preferred method–or, just talk it through with a partner (5 min)
3. Turn to someone next to you (if you haven’t already) and talk through your ideas (3 min)
4. Return as a group and ask for examples of how people narrowed, or might narrow, their topic (2 min)
   1. Reiterate that this isn’t necessarily a 5-minute process, but is a good way to go home and think about it if you’re still struggling.
   2. Ask again if anyone has any ideas for narrowing their topic

**Assessment**

Most immediately, we will assess students by seeing how they contribute to the discussion with their peers. Hopefully, some students will volunteer in the wrap-up section of the lesson so we can see how they managed to narrow their topic either in the past few minutes or over the semester. A long-term assessment is in their final position papers where we will be able to determine the scope of their topic and if it worked for them. We can also compare how their topics evolved and narrowed to previous assignments throughout the semester.