

# GETTING STARTED ON YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

## FIND OUT WHAT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO DO:

Study the wording of the assignment carefully--

- Are there particular issues /topics you must consider?
- What kind of research does it require?
- How long does it have to be?
- What citation style will you need to use for documenting your sources (references)?

## IF YOU HAVE AN ASSIGNED TOPIC:

- Underline the key words in the description of the assignment, the words which pinpoint the topic or which direct you to do certain things in your answer. In the example below, the key words are underlined:

*Explore the major nineteenth century influences on the art of William Morris and discuss their implications .*

Here the key words specify the topic and the actions the writer has to take in order to do the assignment. Picking out the key words in this way will help you to understand what the assignment requires you to do.

- Note whether there seem to be parts to the assigned topic--i.e. In the above case you know that your paper is going to have to deal with at least two major sections, one on defining and exploring the major influences on Morris, the other discussing what these led to, both in his own work and perhaps also the influence he had on later artists.
- Try to determine or formulate the reason behind the assignment...is the professor trying to get you to evaluate research sources? to explore a topic from an historical perspective? Understanding why the professor is assigning the topic may help you to tackle the paper in a more strategic way.
- Within the topic, decide what aspects interest you most, what aspects you have the most questions or thoughts about. Exploring some of these aspects will help you develop your own "voice" within the assignment, leading to a more successful piece of writing.

## IF YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE AND DEVELOP YOUR OWN TOPIC:

Choose one that does the following:

- It interests you
- It excites you enough to want to learn more about it
- When you think about it, you can already list a couple of things you think you know/have heard about it.

## IF YOU CAN'T THINK OF A TOPIC:

Talk to friends, talk to your professor, or check your textbook for discussion questions at the ends of chapters