

By Friday 19 October 2012 you need to agree a research topic with the module co-ordinator. This topic will be used for both

- Assessment 1: presentation and bibliography (15%); and
- Assessment 4: 3,000 word essay (55%).

This practical is about developing and evaluating potential research topics. The choice of a good topic is very important; the topic should be both interesting to you and offer appropriate scope for writing a good research-based essay.

Consider the list of some topics from previous years that can be found here:

<http://cgi.csc.liv.ac.uk/~dominik/teaching/comp516/topics.html>

First, pick one of these topics that you find interesting. Then proceed with the following steps to carefully define and then evaluate a research question based on this research topic. If in the course of carrying out these steps you decide that the topic is not suitable for whatever reason, just pick a different topic.

1. Make a list of keywords, i.e., important concepts or issues, that are related to the topic.
2. Identify a research question based on the topic.
3. In no more than a few of sentences, explain why the research question is interesting.

Now evaluate the suitability of the topic by answering the following questions.

1. Is the research question narrow enough to allow for an interesting “answer” to it in a 3000-word essay?
2. On the other hand, is it broad enough to find adequate information for your research?
3. Following on from the last question: What sources of information would you envisage using for your research? Do you have access to these sources?
4. Is there scope to cover debates, different points of views, open questions, and/or directions for future research and development in the subject area?

Now repeat the above for a topic of your choice that does **not** appear in the given list of topics.

Suppose you have to choose between these two topics. Compare their suitability as the subject of a research-based essay by listing each topic’s pros and cons in relation to the other.

¹ This document can be found at

<http://cgi.csc.liv.ac.uk/~dominik/teaching/comp516/practicals/practical1.pdf>