

Focus Your Topic

BAE 815

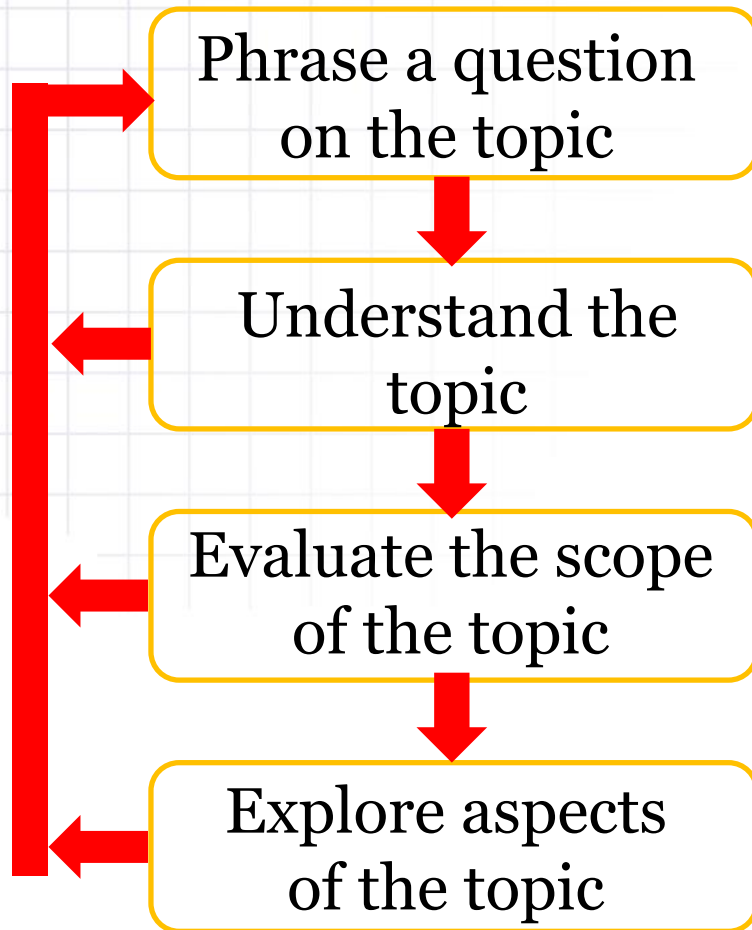
Zifei Liu

Focusing your topic is like using a microscope

- First, select the right slide.
- Then, adjust the focus to the appropriate level.



Steps to focus your topic



As you read more and more, you will gain a better sense of priorities and you may redefine your question.

Focus your topic to the appropriate level

Phrase a question on the topic

Understand the topic

Evaluate the scope of the topic

Explore aspects of the topic

- What exactly do you want to find out?
- What is a researchable question?
- What kind of information do you need?
- **Breaking down your questions into concepts.**

Breaking down your questions into concepts

An example

“The effects of television violence on children”

Concepts	Television	Children	Violence	Effects
Brainstorming synonyms and related concepts	TV, movie, DVD, parental control	Teenagers, youth, adolescent, juvenile	Aggression, crime, brutality	Influence, impact

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Get an overview of the topic, identify key terms and concepts

- Find **a book on the topic**: read the introduction or first chapter
- Read a chapter in a specialized textbook or encyclopedia
- Find and read **a literature review**

Understand your topic

- Identify variations in definitions used by researchers and define your terminology.
- Identify appropriate research methodologies and validated instruments.

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- Evaluate the available resources.
- Run your search by concepts.
- Scan the first 10 or so items in your results list.

Nurture good taste in research

- Read selectively
 - Only abstraction >80%
 - Introduction & conclusions ~50%
 - Methods, results and details <20%
- Consider highly cited articles first

Develop critical thinking

- Identify general patterns in research.
- Identify main gaps in knowledge
- Identify principal areas of dispute and uncertainty, check studies with conflicting findings and explore explanations for discrepancies.

Focus your topic to the appropriate level

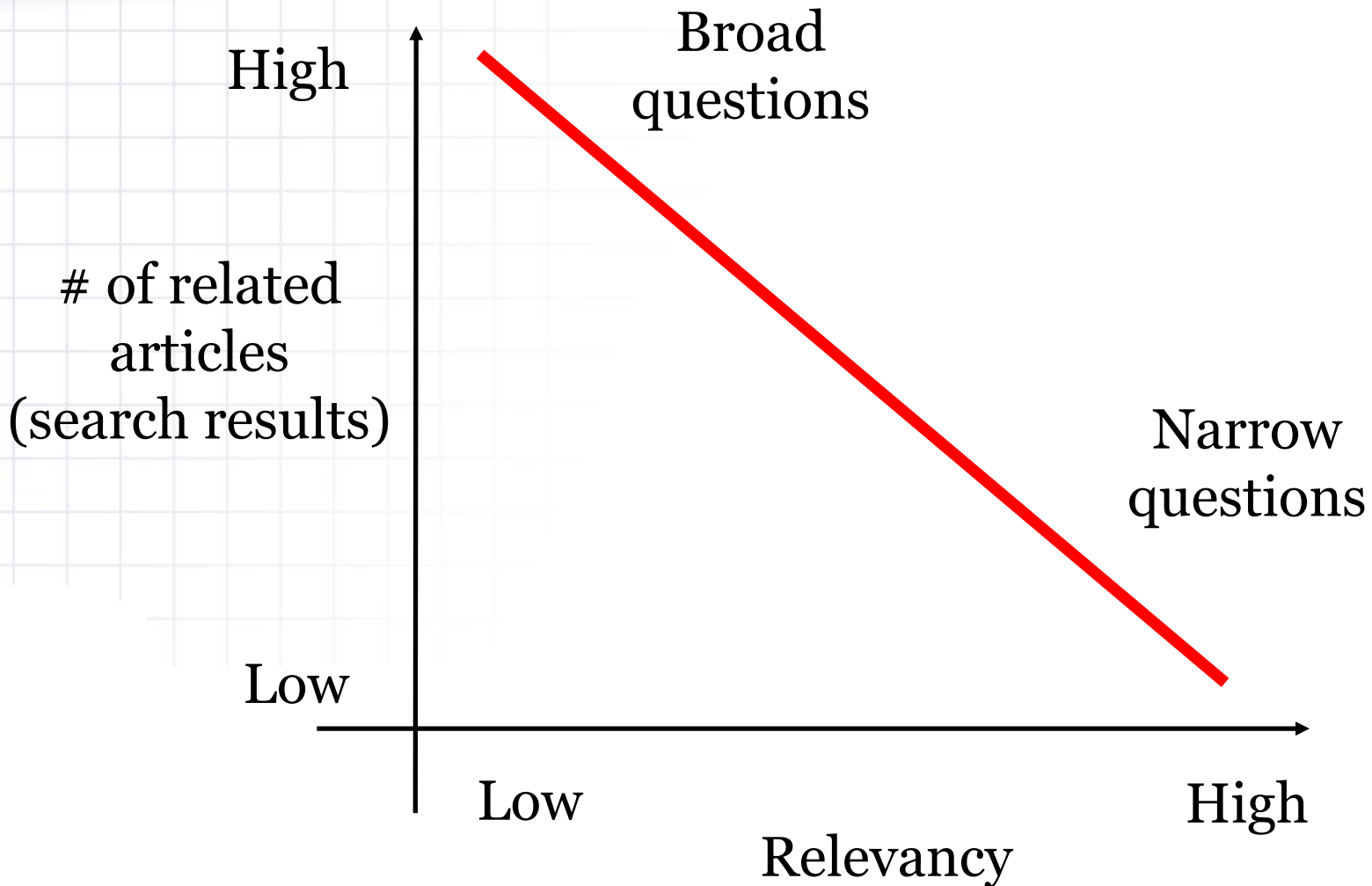
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- Identify several aspects of the topic that might be used to **further focus your topic**. e.g. different method, geographic locations, categories of processes, etc.
- Consider recent papers that point out directions for future research.
- Revise your research question.



(Credit: Robin Featherstone)

- Why does your work need to be conducted?
- How is it different from other studies?
- Where does your work fit within current knowledge?
- What do you expect to contribute?