Topic Development & Keywords Activity

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT
● 20 or 30 minute session
● Any classroom (computers not required)

PREP FOR LIBRARIAN
Consider a topic in which you are interested and be prepared to discuss how you came to be interested in the topic. Consider how you would turn the topic into a viable research question and develop keywords. Slides are available for this activity on the UCWR Research Guide Need Help Page under my picture.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME
Students will articulate their topic ideas and develop keywords to describe their topic.

ACTIVITY OBJECTIVE
The purpose of this lesson and activity is to help students think about how to choose a topic, develop a research question and brainstorm keywords. This activity also helps the students to articulate why they are interested in the topic.

ACRL FRAME(S)
Searching as Strategic Exploration
Research as Inquiry

LEARNING ACTIVITY
Setting the Stage
Model the process you go through when you choose a topic. This should be personal. For example, I am particularly interested in the topic of public shaming on social media. Go over the following process:

Choose a topic.
How to figure out what you’re interested in…
● What are you curious about?
● What irks you?
● What inspires you to read through the end of an article or social media post?
● What do you find yourself googling?
● What links do you click on?
● Personal anecdote - how do you know what interests you? (i.e. For me, what makes me sit in my car in a parking lot or miss my el stop listening to an NPR story?)

Key Point: Don’t choose a topic that’s easy. Most likely it won’t be easy, but it will be boring. Use your natural curiosity. Explore it!
Play with your topic.

Why do you care about?
What do you already know about this topic?
Google your topic.
What do you want to know about this topic?
Jot down questions you encounter.
Bookmark interesting articles.
Record observations.

....do all of this drinking coffee at Metropolis...
....or staring at Lake Michigan in the IC while drinking Metropolis coffee...

Developing a research question.
Using a sample topic, take students through this process of asking questions and exploring.
Think of why and how questions.
Toy with the questions you come up with...
Speculate.
Answer your questions with the knowledge you have.
Capture ideas.
What kinds of information will I need to answer this question?
Remember. Let yourself explore. Don’t judge!

Finding keywords.
Using a sample research question, take the main keywords and find synonyms or related words to describe each keyword. Write it up on a white board. Engage students in the process.

Briefly present places to find keywords - Wikipedia, Google, Thesaurus, etc.

Activity - 6 minutes
Find someone to talk to. Work with your partner to do the following:
Tell your partner about your topic.
Tell them why you care about your topic.
Jot down questions you have about your topic that are:
  ● Open ended
  ● Complex
  ● Arguable
Write down keywords for your question(s).
Switch

Guided Discussion/Reflection
Ask a couple of students to share their topic and why they’re interested in their topic. See what keywords they came up with. Ask if any students ran into any challenges. What were they?
Wrap Up & Time for Questions
Most important thing to remember is to choose a topic that you find fascinating. You’re going to be spending a lot of time with this topic.

ASSESSMENT Informal assessment while students are discussing their topics with their partners.