

# Choosing an Essay Topic

- A. You should choose a topic for your essay from one of the three areas of study in the English Department:
- a. **English and American Literature**
    - includes the literatures of all English-speaking countries: India, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.
  - b. **Applied Linguistics**
    - includes topics like second language acquisition, historical changes in the English language and the development of *World Englishes*, the uses of English in non-native speaking countries, etc.
  - c. **Communications**
    - includes cross-cultural values and communication, the uses of rhetoric in the media, and the influences of popular culture, including music and film, etc.
- B. Once you have chosen a topic, try to narrow it down to a title. Titles of academic papers are often written in noun phrases – a group of nouns, sometimes with a gerund in the title.

A good title also will be specific enough to help you find the right books and information to research it. Ask a question and then turn it into a title. Here is an example of a more specific topic:

**Topic: How does age affect language acquisition?**

*Poor:* Language Acquisition

*Weak:* Language Acquisition and Age

*Better:* The Effects of Age on Language Acquisition

- C. Another way to refine a topic is to make specific questions that you need to answer about it. For a topic in literature, you can compare two novels, even two novels by the same author such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*.
- a. How is Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* different from her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*?
  - b. How does the style of narration in *The Joy Luck Club* differ from that in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?
  - c. In what ways do the characters and the themes in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* differ?
  - d. What are some of the differences between the setting in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*?
  - e. What are the differences with respect to the central characters, June Woo in *The Joy Luck Club* and the central character in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?

# Sample Topics

1. The Process of Second Language Acquisition
2. The Critical Age Hypothesis in Language Learning
3. Language Acquisition in Bilingual Children
4. The Reasons for the Popularity of A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*
5. The English Countryside in the Books of Beatrix Potter
6. A Woman's Place in Society in the Novels of Jane Austen
7. The Differences Between English and Japanese
8. The Theme of the "Runaways" in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*
9. Conflicts in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*
10. An Explanation of the Principles Behind Task-Based Teaching
11. A Comparison of Japanese and American Universities
12. Comparing Two Films by Steven Spielberg

