

**Research Paper Step One:  
Choosing a topic and thesis, oral presentation, and reference list**

The JS 100W instructors have chosen the general topic of **women in the criminal justice system**. However, you must develop a more specific topic. Ask yourself, “When considering all the potential issues related to women in the criminal justice system, I would like to know more about ....?” and, “Is there an area in which I already have particular knowledge?” For example, if you are presently employed with or intend to pursue a career in the area of law enforcement, you might consider examining the barriers women face in policing or if there are performance differences based on gender. If you decided to look at women as offenders you can analyze the effectiveness of gender specific programs in prison or the effects. Do these programs promote rehabilitation? What types of programs are offered for incarcerated mothers?

In the course of narrowing your topic, you will need to conduct document research on the web and/or at the library. As a source of supplemental information, you may interview a professional in the field; however, the interview will not count as one of the required sources for your paper. You will need to choose a topic that can be handled in a relatively short (8-10 page) paper. The topic should be stated as a question:

Example of specific topic: “Do gender specific programs in prison decrease recidivism rates for women?”

**Development of Thesis**

A crucial step in writing is the determination of a clear thesis which can be supported. The thesis differs from the topic in that the topic tells what you are writing about, while the thesis states what you are going to say about the topic. For example, if the topic addresses the use of gender specific programs in prison to minimize recidivism, then one might develop the following thesis:

“While traditional rehabilitation programs in prison are used to decrease recidivism rates, gender specific programs are shown to be more effective for female offenders.”

Keep in mind that you are not being graded on your opinion, but on your ability to communicate and support a point of view (your thesis). Supporting the thesis means utilizing appropriate and compelling evidence to clarify and support the point of view; that evidence will come from your research.

If you run into trouble researching a topic or finding articles to include on the reference list, consult the MLK library liaison for the JS department (see below), or see your instructor for advice:

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## JS 100W

### **Reference List Assignment** (see your course schedule for the due date)

Your reference list will consist of **(10) scholarly peer reviewed journal articles** (no books, web sites, newspapers, or magazines) which relate to your topic, which you may and should use for your research paper. At least half of the journal articles for your reference list (i.e., five) need to be empirical/quantitative research studies.

- The list needs to be typed up in APA style format, with the heading: **References** (centered at the top of the page)
- After each reference citation, you must include a brief explanation (1-2 sentences) about why the article will be (or possibly will not be) useful for your paper.
- You will find numerous APA resources available on the 100W page of web site: [www.justice-studies.com](http://www.justice-studies.com), in addition to your textbooks for the course.
- The purpose of this preliminary list of sources is to show that you are able to do the research and find appropriate articles. You may end up not using all of the articles in your final paper.

### **Topic and Thesis Presentation** (see your course schedule for the due date)

You will be presenting your topic and thesis orally to the class. You may use one 4X6 note card to help you with your presentation if you wish.

On the day of the presentation (before presenting), you will turn in the following to the instructor:

- ❖ A half page (min.) to one page (max.) typed write-up of your topic and your thesis.

After your topic and thesis have been presented in class, the viability of your topic and thesis will be addressed. Whether a topic and thesis are deemed viable for the research paper assignment will depend to a large degree on the availability of peer reviewed articles, in support of the thesis.