

Applying the Common Topics to the Research Paper

In his treatise on rhetoric, Aristotle describes strategies of argumentation and analysis that he called the *topoi*, or the "topics of invention." In Latin these topics were called *loci communes* (common locations), and we still reference that sense in our term "commonplace." The word "topic" comes from the Greek word for "place," and the topics of invention represent a set of metaphorical "places" where writers can "go" to develop ("invent") material to support their case.

These rhetorical "commonplaces" are basic categories of relationships among ideas; each "topic" might serve as a place to begin invention--a location for beginning brainstorming and analysis, for discovering things to say about a subject. In other words, these topics of invention can act as prompts to aid in the process of *discovery*, the stage in writing that provides the raw material that will become the *content* of an essay or other piece of writing. These prompts can help a writer to analyze and develop the material for any writing project.

The Common Topics include:

Definition
Comparison
Relationship
Circumstance
Testimony

While we have used these categories for our Topic-to-Thesis worksheets, in an effort to help with brainstorming, the questions have been modernized to help with your "invention."

Consider:

Describe it

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- What does it "look" like?
- What are its characteristics or qualities?

Analyze it

- How did it happen?
- Why does it work?
- How is it made?
- What caused it?
- What are its effects?
- What are some "parts" that make up the whole?
- Can you divide or classify these parts?
- Into what categories might you organize the parts?
- Are the parts logical – do they fit the whole?

Compare it

- How is it related to something else?
- How does it resemble other things?
- How does it differ from other things?

Apply it

- What are some typical cases or examples of it?
- What circumstances make it possible?
- What circumstances might make it impossible?
- How much can it be changed while still remaining, on the whole, the same at its core?

Argue it

- How might someone argue against it?
- How might someone argue for it?

	Proverb:	Topic:
<p>Describe it:</p> <p>How might I describe this to someone completely ignorant of my proverb/topic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What happened? ○ When did it happen? ○ Why did it happen? ○ Where did it happen? ○ What does it “look” like? ○ What are its characteristics or qualities? 		
<p>Analyze it:</p> <p>Deconstruct your proverb/topic into relevant parts, keywords, or phrases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did it happen? ○ Why does it work? ○ How is it made? ○ What caused it? ○ What are its effects? ○ What are some “parts” that make up the whole? ○ Can you divide or classify? ○ Into what categories might you organize the parts? ○ Are the parts logical? 		

	Proverb:	Topic:
<p>Compare it:</p> <p>To what can my proverb/topic be compared? Are there other persons/places/things like it?</p>		
<p>Apply it:</p> <p>How might a reader be impacted by my proverb/topic? How might my proverb/topic change when applied?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What are some typical cases or examples of it?○ What makes it possible?○ What might make it impossible?○ How much can it be changed while remaining, on the whole, the same at its core?		

	Claim: What will be the heart of my argument?	Counter-claim: How might a reader argue against my topic?
Argue it!		

My suggested working thesis is:
