

## I. Define a Topic in Music

Presume you are interested in writing a paper on improvisation. You may want to define the scope of your paper by defining what constitutes improvisation in music.

### 1. Search for Ideas

If you do not have an idea what constitutes improvisation, search and read articles or books for information on the topic. For example, use the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians online database, select Advanced Search, and type in the term “improvisation”. Results are displayed according to relevancy (100%, then lesser percentages); Items selected are linked to the full-text within the source. Highlighted, color-coded, and/or underlined terms within the text are themselves links to additional and/or related information.

OR, you may do a search in the Library’s online catalog on the word/concept “improvisation”. Searching by keyword should yield the largest number of references; searching by subject provides more specific lists, where the term is used as a subject heading for items on the concept. Selecting the “title” option restricts the results to items that use the word in the title.

After scanning through some articles and books, you should be able to come up with preliminary ideas about your topic. You can also contact the librarians in the Reference Department in-person, by phone, e-mail, and/or online “chat” via the ASK A Librarian service located on the TSU Library web page. It is helpful to consult your instructor for insight and feedback throughout the research process.

## 2. Narrow or Broaden Your Topic

You may find too much information on your topic. In that case, you may want to narrow your topic. For example, in the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians online database, 500 items or “hits” were retrieved when the word/term/concept “improvisation” was searched. Adding another term or concept (i.e., jazz), limiting to specific time periods (2000-present; 20th century) help to narrow research to specific amounts/types of data. If you can find only a few references on your specific topic, you may want to broaden your search by including related concepts and searching these in the same resource, or expanding the search for information on the specific topic to other resources.

## 3. State Your Topic as a Question

Stating your topic as a question may help you to stay within the scope of your selected topic. For example: How has improvisation affected music composition in the 20th century?

## 4. Identify the Type of Information Needed

The type of information needed depends on the following:

- \* Type of Assignment- is this a presentation, term paper, senior project, thesis or dissertation?
- \* Amount of Information- how much information is needed for this assignment?
- \* Currency of Information- do you need data that is current, historical, or both?
- \* Type of Resources Needed-should the information come from scholarly and professional journals only?
- \* Primary vs. Secondary Resources - should the information come from primary or secondary sources?
- \* Information in Various Formats- should the information come from only print resources or include other formats such as visual/ graphic sources, numeric sources (statistics), audio sources and/or electronic sources?