Selecting a Topic

Assignment: In as great detail as possible, describe in one or two paragraphs (minimum 300 words) a topic related to Japanese politics/economy/society that you would like to write on. Provide a list of references of the various sources you looked at in order to pick this topic. Post your paper topic in the dropbox of the “Research Paper Assignments” section of D2L.

Due: September 14, 2016

Finding a topic takes a little time and requires some preliminary research and fishing around. Your goal at this point is to find a topic that interests you and narrow it down to a “do-able” research and writing project. The more specific your topic, the easier it will be for you to research, organize and write your paper. For example, instead of writing a paper on political parties in Japan (a big topic), select a more finely tuned topic such as: (1) the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and how/why it is was able to stage a comeback in recent years; or (2) the effect of the 1995 political reforms on political parties in Japan; or (3) money politics and scandal among the major political parties (LDP, DPJ).

Start your search by first picking a general topic area by looking at the list of suggested paper topics posted on D2L and by reading through any course readings listed on the syllabus that seem interesting to you. Then, using these references and internet searches, start narrowing the focus of the paper to a particular issue within the general topic area.

Examples of moving from a big topic → a specific topic:

The economic recession in Japan in the 1990s-2000s → causes and sources of the recession → 1990s: the bad loan problem and consolidation in the banking industry in Japan

Discrimination against minority groups in Japan → the Burakumin and caste discrimination → forms of protest and confrontation used by Burakumin to improve their socio-economic status

For a general guide on how to go about finding a topic, see http://www.usg.edu/galileo/skills/unit02/.

Students are strongly encouraged to meet with me (kreimann@gsu.edu) or the course writing consultant Elizabeth O’Callaghan (eocallaghan1@gsu.edu) to discuss their paper topic. If you are having trouble with finding a topic that interests you, we might be able to help you with further suggestions and references.
Here are some general topic areas of possible interest for further research to get you started, but also check the longer list on D2L, which provides references:

Politics: electoral reform, Prime Minister Abe and constitutional change, the rise of the political right, women in politics in Japan, the anti-nuke movement in Japan.
Economics: Keiretsu, Abenomics, the lost decades and economic reform, energy policy and politics, healthcare.
Socio-economic and Social issues: aging and demographic problems, immigration, discrimination and minorities in Japan, 3/11 and recovery in Tohoku, the yakuza, women in the workplace and Abe’s “womenomics,” social problems (e.g.hikikomori/bullying and education reform, suicide, etc)
Foreign policy: Japan’s territorial disputes with China or Korea, the US-Japan security alliance, article 9 and defense policy, foreign aid policy (ODA), historical legacies in the region (textbook controversies, comfort women, etc.)

The Next Step: Framing the Research Question or Problem

Once you have selected your topic and written a paragraph describing it, the next step is to form a research question or problem that will frame your paper. This will be a central part of the paper proposal, due on October 5 and you should start working on this immediately.

One of the requirements of the term paper is the presentation of an argument or thesis. I have found that students often have a hard time writing term papers with strong arguments. Instead, they usually collect information, present it as fact without much analysis, and hand in a report that lists facts but does not have an original argument or main point. Your paper needs a point! The root of the problem seems to be that although students find a general topic they are interested in, they do not have a central question or problem that they are trying to answer or address and thus end up just writing about the topic. In addition to a topic, you need a “puzzle” or a question that forms the central core of the paper.

Once you have identified a central question or problem, it becomes much easier to organize your research and formulate a thesis or argument. The best place to start is by thinking about what it is that interests you about the topic area you have chosen, what makes the topic an important one and what sorts of issues and questions have been raised in the literature (or in current events) regarding this topic. After doing a bit of reading on the topic you have chosen, see if there are any obvious questions that you can pose and do further research on.

As you are thinking about a research question, also think about the type of approach and type of research paper you would like to write. Review the writing tips section of the “Guidelines for Writing a Short Research Paper,” which outlines three types of approaches.