

# Sample Instructions for Generating Topics for a Final Master's Thesis or Capstone

## Topic Brainstorming Document

**Directions:** The purpose of this assignment is to explore topics. This document can be useful for people who have no idea what they want to spend time on and also for people who feel 'sure' about their selected topic. By the end of this document, I want you to have generated as many different good, bad, and ugly topics as possible (yes, really!). *(One note: Please don't "dial it in" for this assignment. It's tempting to just answer quickly, but I will be reading and responding to your document, so please give it the old Master's student try!)*

**Part 1: In this first section, we are just going to get warmed up by answering questions that can lead to topics. Jot down the first thought that comes to your mind--I don't want you to belabor the answers, just see what sparks your interests (1-2 sentences for each):**

1. Review all of the classes you've taken and the subjects you've covered. Which was your favorite class and topic (Umbrella Topic; should be fairly broad)?
2. Write down why you got into this field of study:
3. Consider what you like to read about in your free time, especially things related to your field. This list might include books, news articles, or blogs:
4. Think of people in your field who you admire or aspire to be like. List one influential person and then include what you like about them and their work:
5. Think about who you want to be and what you want to achieve from this project. Write down a little goal and a BIG goal.

**Part 2: The spirit of this document is just to play with ideas and get them all out on paper. I invite you to go a bit more in-depth here with this section. You might surprise yourself.**

1. In the space below, please **list** topics that would be so completely boring to you that you would never finish this final project. Please list at least 5 boring, terrible, undesirable, waste-of-time topics that you would hate.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
2. Now that we got the boring, terrible stuff out of the way, you're ready for great ideas! I want you to **list** 5 areas of study, ideas, directions, possibilities for topics in communication that are INTERESTING. You're not committing here, but what are you interested in?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
3. What are some communication problems or issues that have come into your awareness recently? What are you seeing occurring in social settings, corporate settings, workplace settings, public relations settings, etc that are becoming a greater 'public' conversation? Are these problems of interest for you to contribute your voice to the conversation?
4. Even if you are NOT leaning towards a capstone at this time, I want you to think of your current topic in a different way. (You might use this section later for a practical recommendation section in your thesis). What would an interesting APPLIED project look like to you that can speak to a topic in communication? Some examples of applied projects are: Training Programs/Units for Practitioners or Consultants, a PR Campaign about an issue, An Internal Campaign for Employees (e.g., Lululemon campaign from feedback video), a Case Study, a Redesign of an Organizational Tool, a Specific Tool created for your own organization, a policy white paper, a series of informative blog posts, etc. Detail in a few sentences what this Applied outcome might look like or entail.

**Part 3: Narrowing down a bit, I want you to think about some inspiration from the content that you’ve generated above. Let’s take some time to focus on an area with some depth.**

1. Select one project idea from above:
2. Jot a question that you might ask pertaining to the topic (Does NOT have to be an RQ):
3. How might you gather data for this topic?
4. Does this topic make you feel inspired and excited?

#### **Part 4: Challenging the Ideas Further**

Using the information you completed in Part 3, open a generative AI program like ChatGPT and ask the following questions. Input your assessment of each chat response and include a summation of how this direction can be useful to your project, especially since generative AI can be another form of brainstorming, if asked the right kinds of questions. Think of ChatGPT as a friend with knowledge about your topic that can help you push for more insight and different research angles that you might not have thought about!

**Start:** Enter into the prompt box: “I am a masters student in a Corporate Communication program starting my masters thesis on Sensemaking in New Workplace Cohorts. I want to get some direction for where I can start building resources and timely works to consider reading.”

**(Here is an example of what it might look like filled out)**

<b>Prompt for ChatGPT</b>	<b>Response from ChatGPT</b>	<b>Assessment of Usefulness</b>
<b>What existing theories or peer reviewed publications might be a good starting point for [My Topic on...]. Please</b>	<p>Your thesis on "Sensemaking in New Workplace Cohorts" can draw on a variety of frameworks and recent studies. Here are some suggested directions and key resources:</p> <p><b>Foundational Theories</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Weick's Sensemaking Framework:</b></li> </ol>	I will make use of these two readings and start reviewing additional studies that utilize them. I will use these as a jumping off point in narrowing down my research.

<p>use GoogleScholar for up to date references that might be useful for me to review.</p> <p><b>**Sometimes ChatGPT will give you responses that are not quite in line with what you're looking for. Feel free to engage in a "dialogue" with AI for more clarification about what you need. An example might be: "These articles are not quite right. Please send peer reviewed articles that were published in 2020 or later and specifically address sensemaking in the workplace"</b></p>	<p>Karl Weick's work on sensemaking remains a cornerstone. His theory focuses on how individuals construct meaning in organizations through processes like enactment, selection, and retention.</p> <p>2. <b>Dervin's Sensemaking Methodology:</b> Dervin's approach emphasizes bridging knowledge gaps and constructing meaning in interaction, particularly in communication and information sciences.</p> <p><b>Recent Studies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>The Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory (2023):</b> A recent systematic literature review explores updated sensemaking frameworks, including a nine-stage model integrating past theories with modern organizational contexts. This could provide a conceptual lens for your research (source: MDPI)[8].</li> <li>2. <b>Sensemaking in Global Teams (2024):</b> This study analyzes how employees navigate connectivity expectations and work-life boundaries in global teams. It highlights collaborative sensemaking and sensegiving as critical processes in managing organizational norms (source: National Communication Association)[9].</li> </ol>	
<p><b>What are possible audiences or applications that would benefit from a project on [My Topic on...].</b></p>	<p><b>Timely Applications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Investigate the impact of remote work and hybrid workplace dynamics on sensemaking, particularly in diverse teams.</li> <li>● Explore how sensemaking affects knowledge-sharing, onboarding, and cohesion within newly formed</li> </ul>	<p>I will look into case studies that have written on these topics and see I want to go the capstone route in creating a case study.</p>

	workplace cohorts.	
<b>What might be the next steps for completing a project on [My topic]? In other words, what might be a strong direction for my project if it was a thesis? What about a direction for a capstone based on the information that I provided?</b>	<b>Next Steps</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Literature Review: Examine Weick's and Dervin's foundational texts and recent works like those mentioned above.</li> <li>2. Methodologies: Look into thematic or iterative analysis methods, as they are common in recent studies for understanding workplace communication and behavior.</li> <li>3. Target Journals: Focus on publications in organizational communication, information sciences, and human resource management.</li> </ol>	I can review the different parts that AI suggested to see if there are angles that would be useful in the overall project

**Final Reflection Question (Not generated by AI, please):** How did the use of ChatGPT help extend the way you have conceptualized your project? What portions seem most relevant and useful for your project? What ideas were presented that won't fit your project? Lastly, please provide some feedback for the professor on this assignment. What kinds of questions can I help answer or directions are still unanswered?