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## Handout Video SLA 1: Exploration

When starting a research project, it is by no means always clear what you are going to research. You will often not know enough about your subject to ask the right questions. That is why you should always start by exploring a subject.

The process of exploration starts by carefully reading your assignment:

- look at what the learning objectives are
- how elaborate your report should be
- how much time you have been given
- which requirements you should meet.

Do you have a whole block in which to do your research, or just two weeks?

If your learning objective is exploration, your approach to the research will be less in-depth than if it is thorough analysis. If you are not sure about this, ask your lecturer.

Once your assignment is clear you can start exploring your subject. You first gather background information. After all, you would like to know

- what your subject signifies
- how your subject relates to other subjects
- what the most important issues are in relation to the subject
- what technical terms are used.

A useful means of mapping out your subject is a mind map. A mind map is a kind of map of your thoughts around a central idea. You place the subject that you are going to research in the middle. Around it, place words that occur to you when thinking about the subject.

After exploring the subject, you will have a better idea of the areas relating to your subject. Often, the subject will be too broad to be researched effectively within the time available. That is why it is important to define your subject. When defining your subject, bear in mind the following aspects:

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Which language?

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Let's say you would like to carry out research into:

*Problems resulting from the increase in tourism within the Netherlands.*

That is still quite general.

While exploring the subject, you have read that the increase in tourism in Amsterdam is especially high and that this is having an effect on traffic flow. It is important that the infrastructure is adapted accordingly. You therefore choose Amsterdam, traffic flow, and infrastructure as your angle. As it concerns the present-day situation, the last five years are important.

You have now defined your subject by choosing:

- Tourists
- Consequences of increased tourism on traffic flow and modifications to infrastructure
- Amsterdam
- Publications dating from the last five years
- You also select English publications

Your subject is now:

*Modifications to the infrastructure to maintain a good traffic flow to keep up with the growing number of tourists in Amsterdam.*

It could be that your subject is still too general. See if you can define an aspect of your subject even further. For example, you could focus specifically on public transport instead of on the whole infrastructure. Your subject could eventually be:

*Modifications to public transport to maintain a good traffic flow to keep up with the growing number of tourists in Amsterdam.*

You have seen why it is important to first explore your subject. Now you are ready for the next step - formulating the main question and sub-questions.