When you’re allowed to choose your own topic for a writing assignment, this freedom is an exciting opportunity to write about a topic you are passionate about, but sometimes having so many choices can be overwhelming. Below are some categories and broad topic ideas that you can pull from the clouds, or maybe you’ll be inspired with related ideas, either of which might get you going in an exciting direction. On the next page are examples of how to take a broad topic and narrow it, tailoring the idea to the type of assignment you’re writing, such as a narrative, an argument, or a causal analysis (causes/effects).
Narrowing and Shaping Topic Ideas
Based on the Type of Assignment

Below are some examples of broad topics and some ways of writing about the topics based on some specific assignment types.

**Broad Topic: Work**
- **Narrative:** Write a story about a work-related event that changed a way you think or behave;
- **Observation:** Using concrete, sensory language, describe an interesting workplace creating a dominant impression;
- **Causes or Effects:** Examine what caused the disappearance of unions in the United States and/or the effects;
- **Definition:** Define and discuss various meanings of “work”;
- **Literary Analysis:** Analyze a workplace scene (e.g., Sinclair’s *The Jungle*; Ellison’s *Invisible Man*) from fiction – what does it tell us about the society in which the work is set and the author’s attitude toward the topic?
- **Argument:** Argue for or against the four-day workweek/NAFTA/unions/crossing strike lines.

**Broad Topic: Duty/Obligation**
- **Narrative:** Tell the story of a specific event involving your fulfillment of a duty and how it changed you;
- **Observation:** Using concrete, sensory detail, describe an event that involved the fulfillment of a particular obligation – (e.g., a military battle; caring for a sick person; mowing the lawn, etc.);
- **Definition:** Define and explain various types of duty;
- **Cause/Effect:** Discuss the actual or possible effects of failing to fulfill a specific obligation (e.g., making child support payments; registering for the draft, perhaps during an unpopular war; keeping up with home repairs; fulfilling commitments to aiding foreign governments);
- **Argument:** How much do we owe to our parents? Our country? Our religion? Our sorority/fraternity? Our friendships?

**Broad Topic: Love**
- **Narrative:** Tell about a specific personal experience involving some aspect of love that changed the way you perceive or relate to the world or other people;
- **Observation:** Observe couples of different generations in a public place and compare and contrast their generational behaviors and interactions;
- **Definition Essay:** 1) Define and discuss one or two types of love; 2) Define “family”;
- **Evaluation:** Develop some criteria for a loving relationship; evaluate the relationship of two characters in a work of literature;
- **Argument:** Argue for or against same-sex marriage, inter-racial or inter-cultural adoption, forgiveness versus revenge.

*Still stuck?* Think about what makes you feel strong emotions and what you are passionate about. Consider these questions:
- What makes you angry? What do you think is really unfair or wrong?
- What is a problem or solution you’ve been thinking about?
- What are you excited about? What do you like to talk about and do?