Beginning a Research Paper

Narrowing Your Topic
Combine your topic with another subject area to generate ideas:

- Examples:
  - Suicide and Society
  - Suicide and Public Policy
  - Suicide and Medicine
  - Suicide and the Media
- Other combinations?

Once you have decided on an area worth exploring, you will have to narrow further. Example: Does the state have a compelling interest in preventing suicide? Does society have an interest in those who choose death because it seeks to defy death? (Burgess 213)

Your questions:

Testing your assumptions
Now that you have begun asking questions, try to answer one of these in a preliminary way. In this stage it is likely that you will have little evidence to go on. That’s okay.

- Example: I always assumed society has an interest in those who seek to defy death because it seeks to defy death (Burgess 213)

Your assumption:

Forming a research question
Now that you have had to articulate the assumptions behind your assertion, you may be on your way to forming a research question.

- Example: are there situations in which social institutions can aid the individual in dying?

Your research question?

Forming a working hypothesis
The working hypothesis is an idea that you are trying to test. If you already know that answer, then you have probably not found a true research question.

- Example: In cases where the individual has no hope for recovery, social institutions are justified in aiding in that person’s death.

Your working hypothesis:
Refining your thesis
As you read and think about your topic, you will discover that your initial assertions should be refined. This is a natural step in formulating a good thesis. You will have time to modify the thesis to reflect the evidence you gather.

- Example: In efforts to research cases in which individuals have “no hope of recovery,” the writer found this phrase to be too broad and ambiguous.

Comment: This would cause the writer to further refine the meanings of terms. To do so, a case study could be used to help define what is meant by “no hope of recovery.”