

Topics and Issues

What is a topic?

A topic is a large, defined, **body of information**. A topic (eg. “ebooks”) is smaller than a subject area (eg. “digital media”), but larger than a sub-topic (eg. “Kindle books”). Topics are defined in terms of hierarchy, so that sub-topics can nest under topics, and topics nest under subjects areas. Topics can be expressed with simple phrases.

What is an issue?

An issue is a **statement or question** that will divide the opinion of a competent audience. An issue can only be expressed as a full proposition – a sentence – and issues are not categorical, but rhetorical. A topic can be talked about abstractly and unfocusedly, but an issue requires discourse participants to take clear positions supported by rational argument or analysis. Even a subtopic can contain dozens of potential issues.

The following examples illustrate both issues and non issues:

1. “Spotify”
2. “Spotify is an ad or subscription-supported music streaming service.”
3. “Spotify is a good way for artists to make money.”
4. Spotify and Pandora are both music streaming services and they both have drawbacks and benefits.”