



Selecting a Topic

One of the most challenging parts of the competition for a lot of students is the first big decision that you and your team will make together – selecting a topic. eCYBERMISSION offers a few tips and strategies listed below that you can use to help your team select a topic for your Mission Folder.

Remember the Mission Challenges

A good place to start is to remember that the topic you and your team choose must fall under one of our Mission Challenges: *Alternative Sources of Energy; Environment; Food, Health & Fitness; Forces and Motion; National Security & Safety; Robotics; and Technology*. You and your team can review each Mission Challenge page on the eCYBERMISSION website and visit the suggested websites for further information on topics of interest.

What interests you?

One of the first things that you and your team need to think about is what you are interested in. Until you discuss what you are interested in, you won't be able to get specific or narrow down your ideas. Here are a few examples of questions that you might ask yourselves:

- Are you interested in green energy or the environment? How could you demonstrate through experimentation and research how people could become more energy efficient and/or eco-friendly?
- Do you like to play sports? Are the sports you play safe? How could you make them safer?
- How could you make learning easier or more interesting for younger students at your school? Are there any activities or other teaching methods not being used in your school that could help increase student learning and/or improve knowledge retention?
- Are you interested in plant life or agriculture? How do different vitamins and nutrients affect the growth of plants? Is there a non-chemical additive that could be safely used to increase crop yields?
- Do you like robots or other forms of artificial intelligence? In what ways could they assist us that we are currently not utilizing?

Brainstorm!

A fantastic way to come up with a great idea for a topic is to harness the power of brainstorming. Set aside 15-20 minutes to get together with your team and just think of ideas – any ideas at all – to help get the ball rolling on selecting a topic. Have one team member write as many of these ideas down on a piece of paper as he or she can during this time period. The ideas can be broad or specific, new or existing. Remember, there are no bad ideas, just the ones that go unshared. Nothing should be off limits during this time. Hearing the ideas of others will get your mind working, and may give you and your team the creative burst you need to select a topic.

Interview people in the community

One of the three main criteria by which your Mission Folder will be judged is *Benefit to the Community*. A good way to help jump start the ideating process is to interview other students, teachers, parents or other members of the community about potential problems that are affecting your school, hometown or state. You and your team can use this process to help determine ways in which you can benefit your community, and then build your Mission Folder around the problems and concerns mentioned by your interviewees.



Surf the web

Another helpful strategy to use when you are experiencing a mental block in coming up with ideas is to click on your web browser and start searching for ideas. Try searching news headlines in areas of interest to you. You may find an article or story that sparks your imagination and leads to a breakthrough in ideas for you and your team. You can also log on to the eCYBERMISSION website for examples of Mission Folders from our past winners to help think of ideas for your topic. Another method you can try to get your creative energy flowing is to simply use a search engine to surf the web; for example, science projects that others have done.

Don't get discouraged!

Remember, don't get down or discouraged if you and your team do not come up with a topic immediately. Selecting a topic can be a bit of a process – and one that often does not come easily to most teams. Using some of the exercises above to select a topic can be a great opportunity for you and your team to practice the team collaboration skills, which you will be judged on. Always keep an open mind and remember that creative inspiration lies all around you just waiting to be discovered by engaging in activities like watching the news, reading a book, talking to your teachers and friends, or just going outside!

