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# Study Guide

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## USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH

Using the library for research is time consuming and can sometimes be frustrating. A researcher can save much time and avoid unnecessary frustration by following a basic library research strategy, which involves:

1. selecting a topic
2. finding background information
3. restricting a topic
4. locating information in books, magazines and journals, newspapers, and other sources
5. evaluating the sources of information
6. citing and documenting sources of information

Once you select your topic, you may not need to go through every step in your search process, nor do you have to exactly follow the sequence of the steps shown above. This basic library research strategy is to help you make the best use of your time in the library. Most often, a quality result will be produced by being as complete and thorough as possible. Make use of all the resources and services that are available to you.

### SELECT A TOPIC

In making your choice of a topic, make sure you select a topic:

- a) that really interests you
- b) that you can cover adequately within the time and limits assigned
- c) about which you can find enough information

An excellent source for topic selection is the CQ Researcher (Ref. 070 E45) located in the Reference Area of the Kinlaw Library. In addition, you may want to consult with a Reference Librarian on the choice of a good topic.

### FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is a very important step in your search strategy and should be done before going to the catalog or periodical indexes. Doing background reading first will give you some ideas on determining the scope of your topic and may also lead you to specific sources for further information. For a more detailed information on this step see **STUDY GUIDE #2 FINDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION**.

## RESTRICT TOPIC AND FORMULATE A THESIS

While doing your background reading, think about ways of restricting your topic and formulate a preliminary thesis or topic statement, a 1-2 sentence summary on the main point of your paper. This will constitute an "introduction" to your paper to be followed by whatever evidence you collected to develop, clarify, and defend this statement.

While working on the thesis of your paper, think about various questions that can be asked about your topic and consider possible controversies, influences, trends, problems, or effects. To facilitate the planning of your research, as well as to avoid unnecessary research and reading, be as specific as possible in formulating your thesis or topic statement. You can take certain steps in narrowing your topic such as, (1) do some preliminary reading to become familiar with many facets of the topic, or (2) decide on one aspect of the topic or one focus within the topic.

The following list describes some of the ways topics can be limited.

Time span:	the 1970's, not the 20th century
Place:	Egypt, not Middle East
Discipline:	the psychological, theological, or economic viewpoint
Specific event:	Woodstock, not rock concerts
Specific group:	American Indians, not minorities
Specific individuals:	Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, not feminists
Specific category:	noise pollution, not pollution

When formulating a research question, consider the following:

Controversies:	arguments for or against capital punishment
Trends:	trend toward mergers and takeovers beneficial to the economy
Problems:	problems resulting from one-parent families
Effects:	effects of TV on the reading levels of children
Influences:	influence of advertising on language in society
Causes:	cultural causes of obesity in America

## LOCATE INFORMATION

Once you have decided on a topic, found background information, and formulated a thesis or topic statement, you can start compiling a working bibliography - a list of sources useful for your purpose. On the final bibliography to be included in your paper, list only those sources that you actually used and found helpful. Here are suggestions for some basic types of information sources:

**BOOKS** Make sure you use the online catalog effectively. See **HOW TO GUIDE #1 ONLINE CATALOG** for more information. See a Reference Librarian if you need help.

**PERIODICALS** Articles in periodicals (magazines and journals) contain current information not found in books. To find an adequate range of materials, you may have to use more than one periodical index, containing general articles or scholarly

discussions. For methods of selecting and using indexes, see **STUDY GUIDE #3 FINDING ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS**. It also lists a number of the many general and specialized indexes from which you can choose those most useful for your topic. **STUDY GUIDE #5 DISTINGUISHING SCHOLARLY FROM NON-SCHOLARLY PERIODICALS** will help you to determine which periodicals might be best used for your topic.

## **NEWSPAPERS**

Newspaper articles are frequently a good source for recent developments in topics of current interest or for contemporary accounts of past events. They are not listed in the catalog or in the periodical indexes. However, there are some special indexes of newspaper articles and their description is given in **STUDY GUIDE #4 FINDING INFORMATION IN NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS DIGESTS**.

## **PEOPLE**

However helpful the information in the above-mentioned sources may be, you may still have some unanswered questions. These unanswered questions are to be addressed to your librarian, instructor, expert on the subject, or even a representative of government responsible for the area in which you are interested. People are a good source of information, as are recordings, pictures, videos, and the internet. Be sure to use them.

## **INTERNET**

The World Wide Web (or sometimes referred to as the Internet) is a useful source of information - especially for details such as statistics or esoteric bits of information unique to particular fields. Government information and other kinds of free information are especially prevalent. **TAKE CARE** with using this information!! It may be incorrect, outdated, or outright false. Searching for information on the Internet is more challenging than searching for information in a well-organized library. Browsing the Web can be extremely time consuming and often results in little gain. When you want to do research, you need a more structured approach to finding materials. See **STUDY GUIDE #6 - FINDING INFORMATION ON THE WEB** for details on searching the Web. See **STUDY GUIDE #11 - CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SOURCES** for how to evaluate what you have found.

## **LOCATE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS NEEDED**

Having used all sources already described and taken notes on what they contain, you start reviewing your note cards. If you discover that you need more information on your topic, you should include in your library search specialized sources in the reference area. The descriptions below will help you select the most appropriate types of sources, each of which is explained in much greater detail in a separate Study Guide available to you on literature racks in the reference area.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

For a full scale biography or just a few facts about someone, see **STUDY GUIDE #7 FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT PEOPLE**.

- BOOK REVIEWS** Other people's opinions on a certain book may help you evaluate it. See **STUDY GUIDE #8 FINDING BOOK REVIEWS**.
- LITERARY CRITICISM** Interpretations and criticisms of novels, stories, poems, and plays can be located by using special indexes and bibliographies. These are described in **STUDY GUIDE #9 FINDING LITERARY CRITICISM**.
- STATISTICS** If you need to back up a statement or support an argument with numbers, use **STUDY GUIDE #10 FINDING STATISTICS**. It will direct you to places where you will find just about everything that has been tallied, including people's opinions.
- CRITICAL EVALUATION** There are many ways sources can be useful. It is a good idea to look at all kinds of criteria before using a source. See **STUDY GUIDE #11 - CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SOURCES** for more information. It will help you to sort through all of the sources you may want to use for your paper.
- CITING & DOCUMENTING** Be sure to provide a trail for others to follow and to indicate all of the hard work that you have accomplished. This is done through documenting all of your sources of information. Depending on what your professor recommends, you may have to use a particular citation style for your works cited page or bibliography at the end of your paper. See the list of style guides below to help and also **HOW TO GUIDE #5 - MLA STYLE** or **HOW TO GUIDE #6 - APA STYLE**.

These Study Guides **WILL NOT** answer all the questions you may have while preparing your paper. They do not discuss note taking, outlining, and other skills important to the organization and writing of a research paper. If you need any assistance, please consult a Reference Librarian.

## CITATION GUIDES

Ready Ref.

808.02 *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York:  
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808.02 *Chicago Manual of Style*. 14<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).  
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808.02 Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.  
T7 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).  
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T37c         University Press, 1998).

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808.027     Li, Xia. *Electronic Styles: A Handbook for Citing Electronic Information.*  
L5e         (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 1996).

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