



Introduction to Research

A Step-by-Step Guide



To Consider First: What kind of Information are you Looking For?

- **Understand the assignment!**
 - **Reread the assignment sheet (if given) and consider:**
 - **What type of information are you looking for *exactly*?**
 - **In which format and depth: books, academic articles, news articles, statistics, websites?**
 - **How current?**
 - **Do you need primary, secondary or tertiary sources? Click [here](#) for a brief video explaining the differences between these types of sources.**
 - **What is the purpose – what will you create in order to make use of the information that you find? (i.e. essay, research paper, debate, literature review, etc.)**



Step 1: Some “Pre-search” will Get You Started

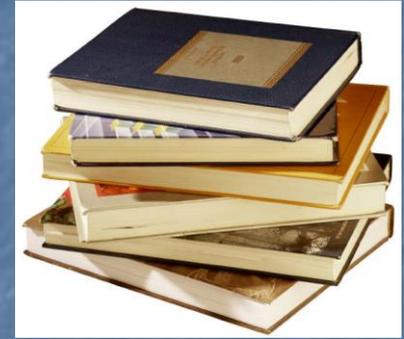
- A. Start by finding an encyclopedia entry or introduction to gain background knowledge of your topic. At this level you will want the “bird’s eye view” only in order to learn the main ideas, terminology, people, and chronology.**
 - Use the online catalog here: [Library Catalog](#) to find introductory sources in the Traurig Library or ask a librarian.
 - Search your topic in in a general encyclopedia here: * [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) (*contact library for user id and password if searching off-campus)
- B. Take notes of your reading, paying close attention to the keywords and main ideas – these terms are extremely important in finding articles and books within databases such as EBSCOhost and the Traurig Library Online catalog.



****Beware: many students rush past this point and end up backtracking to gain the foundation knowledge they need to search (and understand) academic journals, for example.**

Step 1, Continued: Capture your Source Information

- C. As you begin your “pre-search”, or background reading, capture your source information at the same time. Although background sources are *not usually included in your final reference list*, it is helpful to track your research from the beginning in case you need to revisit a source for clarification. You can keep a simple record on paper of **author, title, publisher, date published, URL and information format**, or use some of the free citation tools available on the web such as ****[KnightCite](#) or [Son of Citation Machine](#)**.
- D. In which format does your instructor require your sources to be cited – **[MLA](#), [APA](#), [Chicago - Turabian](#)**? Continue to record citation information for all sources in the style format assigned by your instructor. In addition to the citation tools available on the web, there are many print sources in the on-campus library collection such as *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* or *MLA handbook for writers of research papers*. See a librarian or the library webpage for brief style handouts in print.



****Click on underlined links to visit online sources.**

Step 2: Focus your Search & Deepen your Knowledge



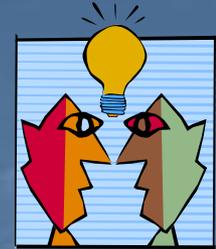
- A. Use the knowledge and keywords you have gained with your introductory text(s) to locate more specialized sources that are of ****high-quality**.
- B. Consult a librarian for help in mapping out a search strategy for newspapers, books, journals, government documents, websites or information in other formats.
- C. As you read and take notes, ask yourself these questions:
 - What questions or ideas come to me as I read: what is unclear, unanswered, contradictory or surprising?
 - Do I need to narrow or expand the topic in order to fit the requirements of my final product, i.e., 6-page research paper, literature review, etc?

****See the Traurig Library tutorials, *Evaluating Information Sources & Searching for Journal Articles*. For a tutorial of tips about Reading to Write, click [here](#).**

Step 3: Create a Working Thesis Statement

- A. Use your notes to write out your topic as one or more questions to be answered based on the main concepts. You may use free-writing techniques, [concept mapping](#) or other strategies to think this step through.
 - For example, write a research question by completing this sentence: I want to know why/how/what....
- B. Write a thesis, which is the answer to your research question, and be sure that it meets all the requirements of a good thesis shown on the next slide.
- C. If created from an assigned question, include all elements that the instructor has asked you to consider, as well as your own analysis of your sources. A restatement of a writing prompt is not a thesis.
 - For an excellent guide to creating working thesis statements from the University of North Carolina, click [here](#)

Elements of a Strong Thesis



- Often a single sentence or two near the end of first paragraph
- Specific and reflects a position that you defend persuasively in your paper
- Controversial – not a statement of a fact or a summary of reading, but a claim that is open to disagreement among reasonable people (Creates tension)
- Guides your reader through your argument, much like a road map
- Well-supported by evidence in your paper

Examine the examples of weak and strong thesis statements on the next slide.



Examples of Strong and weak Thesis Statements



Weak Thesis

Stronger Thesis

Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel. ***(Statement of opinion, has no tension or evidence)***

Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature. ***(Statement of interpretation, sets a "roadmap" to provide specific evidence supporting this interpretation.)***

The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different. ***(Vague, reads like a restatement of a writing prompt with no critical thinking in evidence – leads reader to wonder, "What were the reasons?")***

While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government. ***(Proposes specific reasons for which the North and South fought the war – sets the stage for a compare/contrast essay)***

Many people in the world are victims of stereotyping. ***(Vague, no controversy or tension)***

Prejudgments are harmful because they limit the lives of the stereotyped individual and the person doing the stereotyping. ***(Is now more specific, can be argued with evidence showing the effects of stereotyping)***

This paper will first suggest qualities essential to a good corporate manager and then discuss how those qualities contribute to overall management style. ***(Merely provides a "roadmap" but no controversy or tension)***

Character qualities that make corporate managers successful often make their management styles ineffective. ***(Provides both a "roadmap" to the author's paper and a controversial argument.)***

Step 4: Revisit your Sources and your Working Thesis Statement

Research is a Cyclical Process



- A. Identify what types of information that you need to move forward to a deeper understanding of your topic or to strengthen your working thesis.
- B. Modify your thesis as your reading deepens your level of thinking.

Step 5: Write and Revise a Rough Draft

- A. Write a rough draft of your paper. Click [here](#) for a guide to beginning and revising your rough draft from the University of North Carolina: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/revising-drafts/>
- B. Reread your draft and:
 - Check that you have fulfilled all requirements of your assignment.
 - Check for logic and coherence in your argument (Does it make sense and does it stay on topic?).
 - Check that you have provided specific evidence to support your thesis.
 - Get feedback from your instructor, friends, family, possibly the [Writing Center](#).

Post University Writing Center Resources

- [Post Writing Center Web Page](#)
- [Owl at Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

Additional Online Guides to Research and Writing a Research Paper

A+ Research and Writing for High School and College Students

- *“An excellent step-by-step guide to writing research papers which includes tips for getting started, finding information in cyberspace and in the library, and a good annotated list of links to online resources for research and writing.” From the Internet Public Library. – Librarians’ Index to the Internet*
 - <http://www.ipl.org/div/aplus/stepfirst.htm>

Writing a Research Paper

- Created by Purdue University Online Writing Lab, this hyperlinked guide is written in conversational style to help students explore the elements of a research paper: genre, topic, scope, thesis or question, research, outline, first draft, revisions and editing.
 - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html>

Works Consulted

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