

How do I begin the research process?

Depending on your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange these steps to adapt this outline to your needs.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC

SUMMARY: It is often helpful to state your topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, *What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?* This will help you to identify the main concepts or keywords in your question.

STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION


SUMMARY: Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopedias. Read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

STEP 3: USE THE ONLINE CATALOG TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA

SUMMARY: Use keyword searching for a narrow or complex search topic. Use subject searching for a broad subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the call number. Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, look at the other books in the area. They may also be related to your topic. Once you have the book in hand, look to see if it contains a bibliography to help you locate additional sources.

STEP 4: USE INDEXES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

SUMMARY: Use periodical indexes to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print or electronic formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic. Ask a librarian if you need help figuring out which index and format will be best for your topic. You can search for periodical articles by the article author, title, or keyword. If the full text is not linked in the index you are using, use the

 button to help you to locate the article.

STEP 5: LOCATE INTERNET RESOURCES

SUMMARY: Use **search engines** (such as [Google](#), [Yahoo](#), [Bing](#), [Ask.com](#), etc.) to locate materials on the Web or ask a librarian for suggestions.

STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND

SUMMARY: Use the criteria we've provided on the next page of this booklet and on the library web site for suggestions on critically evaluating the authority and quality of the books, articles and web sites you located. If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. Check with a librarian or your instructor if you need help with this process.

STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT

Give credit where credit is due. Cite your sources. Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes. It gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references. Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism.

The Seven Steps of the Research Process