

Research Strategy Guide

Topic selection is very important. First, select a topic that is interesting to you. Second, get a clear focus of your topic. You can obtain focus on your topic in several ways:

- Read background information about your topic using a general or specialized encyclopedia
- Briefly research your topic (a good source may be the Web)
- Learn some subdivisions and subtopics regarding your topic (use an online catalog or Library of Congress Subject Headings List or a subject search concerning your topic on EBSCOhost)
- Learn about the different sides and issues regarding your topic (use an online newspaper source)

If you do not focus on your topic, it may result in a poorly conceived and poorly written paper that integrates new information into arguments badly or not at all. The result is a hodgepodge of quotation, paraphrase, original thought, redundancy, logical gaps, unanswered questions, and contradictions. If you do go through the process of focusing on your topic, you will learn synonymous terms and subtopics regarding your topic. These synonymous terms and subtopics will become keywords that you will want to use in further research of your topic.

Research Steps

1. **Task Definition**—identify the information question or problem; relate it to what you already know; refine the question or problem; identify what further information is needed
2. **Search Strategy**—identify type of information needed (factual, analytical, objective, subjective, primary, secondary); determine the quantity of information needed; decide how current your information must be (recent, historical); decide how scholarly or technical your information must be; consider and prioritize possible sources of information (library catalogs, Internet resources, reference books, indexes and databases for periodical articles, government publications, biographical sources); identify subject headings and keywords you will need to access information you seek for your project
3. **Location and Access**—recognize a variety of systems for organizing information resources; use indexes to locate information
4. **Use of Information**—engage with the information (read, hear, view your information); extract relevant information from a source
5. **Synthesis**—organize information from multiple sources (use note cards or categorize print outs); create and present the information
6. **Evaluation**—judge the product (was my product effective); judge the information problem-solving process (was my information process efficient)

Allow yourself plenty of time for the research process.

Keep in mind that librarians can provide you with assistance regarding your research needs.
