

LIBRARY SUBJECT GUIDE:

The Seven Steps of the Research Process

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC.

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?" Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. Use a thesaurus to identify synonymous words.

STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

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, reserve readings, and other reference books.

STEP 3: USE CATALOGS TO FIND BOOKS AND OTHER MEDIA. (Web Collection Plus)

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 location information (call number and library). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject; they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area.

STEP 4: USE INDEXES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES. (EBSCOhost)

Use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. Indexes and abstracts may be in print or computer-based formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic. Ask a reference librarian or your instructor if you need help figuring out which index and format is best for you.

STEP 5: FIND INTERNET RESOURCES.

Use search engines and subject directories to locate materials on the Web.

STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND.

Evaluate the authority and quality of the information you locate. If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. Check with a reference librarian or your instructor.

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.

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