

RESEARCHING & WRITING THE PAPER a resource guide

Understand the assignment requirements and the instructor's expectations

Type of paper (analytical, argumentative, essay, research paper, speech?), the length, the number and types of resources required, and the date due. How many pages? Are Internet resources allowed (other than library databases)?

Be familiar with the basics of research using the library and the Web

Print resources (use online library catalog): subjects—library orientation; library science research.

Web resources: Internet Public Library Info Search Guide: www.ipl.org/div/teen/aplus/infosearch.htm and www.ipl.org/div/websearching/#Selective.

Be familiar with the basics of writing a research paper

Know how to go from a general topic to a question to a hypothesis to a thesis—and how to put it all together in a paper. *Print resources*: use online library catalog: subject—report writing. *Web resources*:

The Gale Guide to How to Write a Term Paper: www.gale.com/free_resources/term_paper/index.htm

Internet Public Library A+ Research and Writing Guide: www.ipl.org/div/teen/aplus

Know how to cite your sources and format your paper according to the MLA style.

Print resources (use online library catalog): keyword—MLA.

Web resources: Using MLA Format http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html

Writing a Research Paper <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/>

A Guide for Writing Research Papers <http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>

Select and develop your topic

1) Browse for topic, locate background information, or select a general topic if you haven't a specific topic in mind at this point

Choose something that interests you—topics connected with your major, your job, significant people and events in your life as well as current issues that might interest you.

Examples of general topics (usually a keyword or two): privacy issues, cloning

Print resources: *Taking Sides* (Ref), *Opposing Viewpoints* (Circ), *CQ Researcher* (Ref and Circ), *10,000 Ideas for Research Papers* (Ref and Circ), encyclopedias (Ref), newspapers, magazines, table of contents and indexes in books on broad topics.

Electronic resources: radio/TV news programs, talk shows, news websites. Special websites: National Issues at www.nationalissues.com, O'Keefe Library Best Information on the Net <http://library.sau.edu/bestinfo/Hot/hotindex.htm>, Issues and Causes at Yahoo! http://dir.yahoo.com/society_and_culture/issues_and_causes (Home>Society and Culture>Issues and Causes), Project Censored www.projectcensored.org. Links to other sites: www.lib.usm.edu/~instruct/guides/topics.html

2) Narrow topic/select an aspect of a topic

(a) Add or change concepts/keywords (b) Pose topic as a question (keywords underlined)

Examples: Does the threat of terrorism justify government infringement on the right of privacy? Can cloning be morally defended as a means of treating incurable diseases?

3) Test the topic with a literature search

Is there an adequate amount of information on the topic for a variety of sources? Is there too little information to provide enough depth? Is there too much general information to provide a focus? What alternate topic ideas does the literature search yield?

4) Refine the topic if necessary

(a) Narrow the topic further if there is too much information (b) Widen (broaden) the topic, or change it completely, if you cannot find enough information

Research your chosen topic

Books: Consider all online access points

Library Catalogs: TLC LS on ACC Library homepage at www.youseemore.com/arapahoec, or from www.arapahoe.edu, ACLIN at www.aclin.org (public libraries and college libraries), Prospector (other college libraries) at <http://prospector.coalliance.org>.

Electronic books: netLibrary (authorized registration required at ACC at www.netlibrary.com); various free access websites, including National Academy Press at www.nap.edu, the IPL Books Collection at www.ipl.org/div/books, Project Gutenberg at www.promo.net/pg

Periodical articles: Consider all possible resources

Start out using the ACC periodicals databases. After using periodicals databases and you can't find the full-text of your article from a citation or abstract, try:

- ACC Periodicals List available at the Reference Desk (contains listings for hard copy in Library, on microfilm/fiche in Library, as well as holdings by ProQuest and at www.ipl.org)
- APL/CORE (<http://old.arapahoelibraries.org/cgi-bin/aplcore>), Prospector (<http://prospector.coalliance.org>) and ACLIN Virtual Library (www.aclin.org) for periodical holdings at area college and public libraries
- Denver Public Library's and Auraria's large collection often have the periodicals you're looking for
- Interlibrary Loan (ILL) request (could take a couple weeks for photocopy request)
- Ingenta (formerly UnCover)—available by fax in 24 hours for a fee. Its huge holdings is also very useful for citations for use in obtaining articles elsewhere

If you have plenty of time, do an ILL request, otherwise you can go to an area library once you have identified where the periodical is held

Tips for using keywords for online searching

—If no satisfactory results, substitute original keywords with similar terms, related terms, synonyms, and alternate and variant spellings

—Refine the topic if necessary by widening or narrowing it

If there is too much information, you might need to narrow your topic; if too little, narrow it. If you cannot find enough information, you might have to choose an alternate topic.

- Widen (broaden) by (a) using more general terms, (b) using fewer terms, (c) using synonyms or alternate terms or spellings (in place of or in addition to existing terms), (d) some search engines/databases allow truncation (* or ?) to expand root word
- Narrow (specify) if there is too much information by (a) using more specific terms, (b) using more terms
- Place phrases (two or more words that go together) within quotations (“ ”)
- Consider using the advanced feature of Boolean searching offered by some databases and search engines (Boolean operators AND, OR and NOT) to add more precision to your searches
- Be aware of using singular/plural forms of words (a) singular forms result in more hits in some search engines, (b) using both singular and plural increases hits and varies results in some search engines
- Be aware of capitalized words: some search engines/databases are case sensitive, others are not

Tips for using the Internet for research

- Exercise caution and judgment in using websites (or any other information source): evaluate credibility and quality using AACCUSO as your criteria: Authority, Accuracy, Currency, Coverage, Usefulness, Scholarliness, Objectivity (see www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html)
- For scholarly sites, use academic subject directories such as the Librarians' Index to the Internet (www.lii.org)
- With general search engines and commercial directories, your first choice should be government and university sites. Restrict your searches in Google or Yahoo! by combining keywords in text box with site:.gov or site:.edu
- To exclude book sites on a topic in a Google or Yahoo! search type –book in search box
- Combine topics with these keywords for more scholarly results: study, journal, statistics, history
- Basic facts, definitions, statistics, etc. can be found in reference sites at www.ipl.org and www.refdesk.com