

RESEARCHING A TOPIC

TEN TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Choose a subject you know something about or are interested in. Look through *10,000 Ideas for Term Papers, Projects, Reports, & Speeches* (REF H31.S73 T46).
2. Identify possible subject headings. Use “see” and “see also” listings in the periodical indexes. Refer to the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* books (located near the Reference Desk). Ask a librarian to help you choose correct headings for your topic.
3. Survey the amount of information you can find in books, magazines and newspapers by checking the online catalog and in the periodical and newspaper indexes.
4. Scan the table of contents, index and appendices of books to get a quick idea of the information they contain and how it is arranged. Also, special glossaries, bibliographies, study guides and tables or lists can be useful.
5. Find background information on your topic using:
 - a. General and/or specialized encyclopedias
 - b. Overviews in books (introduction or prologue)
 - c. For both sides of an issue refer to:
 - Current Controversies* REF H30.C87
 - Information Plus* REF H30.I53
 - Opposing Viewpoints* REF H31.O66
 - Taking Sides* REF H31.T35
 - d. For current news events use:
 - Facts on File* REF D410.F3
6. Narrow, broaden, or change your topic depending on what you find.
7. Research current sources of information for details and updates:
 - Computerized periodical indexes (*InfoTrac, Newsbank, and CQ Researcher*)
 - Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*
 - Specialized periodical indexes (art, business, education, general science, social sciences, humanities, oceanography, and psychology)
 - Paper newspaper indexes: *Los Angeles Times Index, New York Times Index, and Wall Street Journal Index.*
8. Find details to support your research findings:
 - a. Statistics *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*
REF HA202.U5x
 - b. Definitions Specialized subject dictionaries
 - c. Opinion Surveys *Gallup Poll: Public Opinion*
REF HN90.P8 G35
 - d. Government Activity *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*
REF JK1.C66
 - e. Biographical Materials *Current Biography*
REF CT100.C8
National Cyclopedia of American Biography
REF E176.N272
Biography Index
REF – Index Table
Newspaper Indexes
9. Develop the habit of searching for information in a structured, systematic way. Ask yourself:
 - What do I already know?
 - What do I need to know?
 - Where am I likely to find it?
10. Keep a record of where you look for information and where you did and did not find it.
 - a. Write down the source, the subject heading(s) you used, and the time periods covered by the source you checked.
 - b. When you photocopy something, write the complete bibliographic information (the citation) on the photocopy.

Books	Periodicals	Newspapers
Author	Author, if any	Author, if any
Title	Title of article	Title of article
Publisher	Name of magazine	Name of newspaper
Place of publication	Date of magazine	Date, including year
Edition, if any	Volume, if any	Section
Date of publication	Page(s)	Page(s)
Page(s)		Column