

Brainstorming for a Research Topic

Before you begin researching your topic, it is a good idea to brainstorm ideas and refine your focus.

- What are you interested in researching and why?
- Work to make connections between your interests and the issue(s) involved in this subject.
 - If you need some ideas to get your brain moving, conduct some informal research through the university database or a web search to find out the types of issues involved in your subject of interest.
- Brainstorm about the subject by listing issues, asking questions, and writing freely about your ideas.
 - *See Strategies for Brainstorming handout*
- Focus on examining one narrowed issue rather than a broad subject.
 - BROAD SUBJECT: The hazards of fad diets
 - NARROWED ISSUE: The hazards of low-carbohydrate diets

Creating a Research Question

Writing a research question clarifies and focuses the goal of your research and writing.

To create a research question, consider the following:

I am studying... _____

In order to find out... _____

In order to help my reader understand... _____

Combine these sentences to create a research question.

Once you have drafted a research question, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the research question specific and detailed?
- Is it interesting and motivating to *you* as the researcher and writer?
- What types of information will you need to answer this question?
- Is the scope of information needed to answer this question reasonable?
 - Consider timeline for completing research and writing the document.

Researching Your Topic

With a research question to guide you, make a plan to effectively research your topic using credible sources.

- Consider different venues of research available to you.
 - library, databases, online
- Consider the different types of sources available to you.
 - books – reference, textbook, edited collection, etc., periodicals – academic journals, magazines, newspapers, etc., bibliographies, government documents, public records, primary sources

The library is the information hub, offering access to books, periodicals, bibliographies, and other resources.

- *Physically visit the library.* You can use the library computer terminals to conduct research through the digital book catalog, browse the book stacks, and/or talk with a librarian.
- *Virtually visit the library.* You can search the library's online catalog from anywhere.
- *Visit public libraries.* You can use www.worldcat.org to find resources available in other libraries.

Write your own future!

The Research Process



University databases are provided through your tuition dollars and offer access to periodicals, online books, and other resources.

- *Search databases online – from anywhere.* As a TAMUCC student, you can use your Islander login information to access the university databases from anywhere.
- *Use subject headings to narrow your search results.* Most databases use specific subject headings to organize and search for sources. These subject headings or subject terms can be found on the database, usually under a tab or link.

Online access to information provides an enormous amount of information, some of which is more credible than others.

- *Use descriptive key words in search engines.* Use the key words or phrases associated with your focus of research to search online.
- *Use a metasearch engine.* These search other engines (Google, Yahoo!, Webcrawler) to provide you with a compiled list of relevant results.
 - dogpile.com
 - mamma.com
 - metacrawler.com
 - surfwax.com
- *Use specialized search engines.* These narrow the sources retrieved.
 - <http://scholar.google.com/> - GoogleScholar limits results to scholarly, peer-reviewed sources
 - <http://ipl.org/> - Internet Public Library is an educational search engine maintained by libraries
 - <http://www.loc.gov/index.html> - Library of Congress website offers digital collections + online catalog
- *Analyze the web address.* The suffix of the web address tells you the type of entity providing information to the website.
 - .com commercial
 - .edu educational
 - .gov government
 - .mil military
 - .net network organization
 - .org organization

Evaluating and Managing Your Sources

Evaluating Sources

As you conduct research, it is important to evaluate the sources you find in order to select sources that are credible as well as relevant to your research focus. When evaluating sources, it is important to consider the author(s), their purpose in writing, and the organization publishing their writing. *For more specific information on evaluating sources, see Evaluating Print Sources and Evaluating Web Sources handouts.*

Managing Sources

As you go through the research process and find sources relevant to your research question, you will need to create a system for managing the information in these sources as well as the publication information necessary to cite them in your research paper. An annotated bibliography includes the source's publication information cited in a documentation style (APA, MLA) as well as a brief paragraph discussing the information provided by the source. *For specific information, see Annotated Bibliography: APA and MLA handouts.*

The information for this handout was compiled from the following sources:

Lester, J. D., & Lester, J. D., Jr. (2012). *Writing research papers: A complete guide* (14th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
Mann, T. (2005). *The Oxford guide to library research*. New York, NY: Oxford.

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