

USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH*

Using the library for research is time consuming and can sometimes be frustrating. A researcher can save much time and avoid unnecessary frustration by following a basic library research strategy, which involves:

1. **selecting a topic**
2. **finding background information**
3. **restricting a topic**
4. **locating basic information in books, periodicals (magazines), newspapers, and through other sources**
5. **locating additional information as needed**

Once you select your topic, you may not need to go through all five steps in your search process, nor do you have to follow the sequence of the steps shown above. This basic library research strategy is to help you make the best use of your time in the library.

BASIC SEARCH STRATEGY

1. **Select a topic.**

In choosing a topic, make sure you select one:

- a) **that really interests you.**
- b) **that you can cover adequately within the time and limits assigned.**
- c) **about which you can find enough information.**

2. **Find background information.**

This is a very important step in the search process and should be done before you use the online catalog or databases. Doing background reading first will help you to determine the scope of your topic and may also lead you to specific sources for further information. Consulting a *subject encyclopedia* or another reference source will assist you by acquainting you with the terminology and concepts related to your topic. For more detailed information on completing this step, see **STUDY GUIDE #2, FINDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION.**

3. Restrict your topic and formulate a thesis.

While doing your background reading, think about ways to limit your topic and formulate a preliminary thesis or topic statement, which is a one- to two-sentence summary of the main point of your paper. This will constitute an "introduction" to your paper to be followed by the evidence you collected to develop, clarify, and defend this statement.

While working on the thesis of your paper, think of questions that can be asked about your topic, and consider possible controversies, influences, trends, problems, or effects. Be as specific as possible in formulating the thesis or topic statement to facilitate the planning of your research and to help in note-taking and in organizing your data. A specific statement will also aid in preventing unnecessary research and reading.

The following list provides examples of ways in which topics can be limited:

Time span:	the 1970's, not the 20th century
Place:	Egypt, not Middle East
Specific discipline:	psychological, theological, or economic view
Specific event:	Woodstock, not rock concerts
Specific group:	American Indians, not minorities
Specific individuals:	Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, not feminists
Specific category:	noise pollution, not pollution

4. Locate basic information.

Once you have decided on a topic, found background information, and formulated a thesis or topic statement, you can start compiling a working bibliography, which is a list of sources useful for your purpose. In the final bibliography to be included in your paper, list only those sources that you actually used and found helpful. Here are suggestions for five basic types of information sources:

BOOKS To determine what books on your topic are available in King's College Library, consult the **online catalog**, which is accessible through the library web page. If you need help in using the catalog effectively, consult a reference librarian.

PERIODICALS Articles in periodicals (magazines and journals) contain current information not found in books. You may access articles through electronic databases, or in the library's periodical collection. To find adequate information, you may have to use more than one database or print index. For methods of selecting and using indexes, see **STUDY GUIDE #4, FINDING ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS**, which provides a list of general and specialized indexes from which you can choose those most useful for your topic. The resource titled **Databases**, located in the study guide rack, may also be helpful. It offers descriptions of the electronic databases that the library offers to King's College community.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Frequently overlooked, government documents contain helpful material on subjects from art to zoology. For help in locating government publications consult **STUDY GUIDE #6, FINDING INFORMATION IN GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS.**

NEWSPAPERS

Newspaper articles are frequently a good source for recent developments in topics of current interest or for contemporary accounts of past events. Information about newspaper indexes and databases is provided in **STUDY GUIDE #5, FINDING INFORMATION IN NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS DIGESTS.**

PEOPLE

However helpful the information in the sources listed above may be, you may still have some unanswered questions. These questions should be addressed to your librarian, instructor, expert on the subject, or even a representative of government responsible for the area in which you are interested. People are a good source of information, as are recordings, pictures, books, or articles. Be sure to use them.

5. Locate additional information as needed.

After you have used all sources described above and have taken notes on what they contain, start reviewing your note cards. If you find that you need more information on your topic, specialized sources in the reference area may be very helpful. The descriptions below will help you select the most appropriate types of sources, each of which is explained in much greater detail in a separate **Study Guide** available to you on literature racks in the reference area.

BIOGRAPHIES

For a full scale biography or just a few facts about someone, see **STUDY GUIDE #7, FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT PEOPLE.**

BOOK REVIEWS

Other people's opinions on a certain book may help you evaluate it. See **STUDY GUIDE #8, FINDING BOOK REVIEWS.**

LITERARY CRITICISM

Interpretations and criticisms of novels, short stories, poems, and plays can be located by using bibliographies and special indexes. These are described in **STUDY GUIDE #9, FINDING LITERARY CRITICISM.**

STATISTICS

If you need to back up a statement or support an argument with numbers, use **STUDY GUIDE #10, FINDING STATISTICS.** It will direct you to places where you will find just about everything that has been tallied, including people's opinions.

The Study Guides do not answer all questions you may have while preparing your paper. They do not discuss note-taking, outlining, and other skills important to the organization and writing of a research paper. Listed below are some valuable sources for a review of term paper writing skills. Also consult King's College Writing Center.

- Ready Ref.
150.72
Am35P
- American Psychological Association. **Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association**. 5th ed. (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).
- Ready Ref.
808
L612E
- Crane, Nancy B. and Xia Li. **Electronic Styles: A Handbook for Citing Electronic Information**. 2nd ed. (Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 1996).
- Ready Ref.
808.02
G35M
- Gibaldi, Joseph. **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers**. 6th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2003).
- 808
L669H
- Lipson, Charles. **How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper**. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Ref.
808
St89E3
- Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White. **The Elements of Style**. (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).
- Ready Ref.
378.242
T849M5
- Turabian, Kate L. **A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations**. 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

*Adapted from materials developed by the Undergraduate Library, the University of Texas - Austin.

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