



WRITING CENTER

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Research Strategies

Knowing how to properly conduct research efficiently and effectively is a critical skill for college students. Research can be challenging and time consuming if you are unfamiliar with the process and what steps to take. The best way to begin is by visiting your university library, either in person or via the website. From there, you can follow these steps in order to successfully conduct your research:

1. Create Your Topic
 - a. Write out your topic in a clear and concise manner. Good research starts with a specific focus.
 - b. Having an outline for your paper would be beneficial as it allows you to pinpoint what information is needed from research.
2. Locate Background Information:
 - a. Once you have your topic chosen, you are ready to begin searching for background information. This will supply you with the *whos* and the *whens* of the topic. It will also provide you with a broader context as well as the important terminology.
 - b. Excellent sources of background information are subject-specific encyclopedias and dictionaries, books, and scholarly articles, and organizations' websites. You should always consult more than one source so you can compare for accuracy and bias.
3. Identify Other Information Needed:
 - a. Once you have background information, it is time to determine what information is needed from research articles. One way to determine this is to turn your overall topic into a list of questions to be answered. This will help you identify the type and level of information you need.
 - b. This step also allows you to determine keywords and concepts for search engines and databases. One way to begin is to extract the most important words and phrases from the questions produced from above. It is important to think about alternative words and phrases that you might use since authors may write or talk about the same topic in different ways.
4. Consider Scope of Topic

- a. Next you should identify the scope of your topic and any limitations it puts on your searches. Some examples of limitations are language, publication date, and publication type. Every database and search engine will have its own rules so you may need to click on an advanced search option in order to input these limitations.
5. Conduct Your Searches
- a. The final step is to start sifting through information and sources. Identifying which resources to use is not always easy to do. As you only want information from the most reliable and suitable sources, you should always evaluate your results. It is important to check the author's credentials, if the article is current or outdated, and whether or not the publisher or organization behind the source is considered reputable.

If you are not able to locate the information you need after these steps, there are other approaches you can take to finding what you need. There may be better resources or different keywords and concepts you could have tried. Additional background information might supply you with other terminology to use. It is also possible that the information you need is just not available in the way you need it and it may be necessary to consult others for assistance, like an expert in the topic or a professional librarian.

Still need help with researching?
Make an appointment with the Writing Center!
Library, Room 311/312
www.bradley.edu/writeright