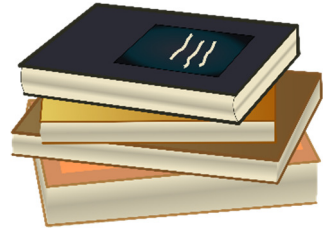


Research Paper 101 Series

Step Three A: Research – Getting Started

Now that we have created a research question and/or drafted a thesis statement, it's time to begin your research. In order to effectively argue for the validity of your thesis statement, you must find evidence to support your claims. The goal of your research is to find trustworthy, scholarly resources that will support the central argument of your thesis.



Research is the process that gathers the evidence to prove your thesis statement to be true.

1. *What is research?*

The English Oxford Dictionary defines research as “the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.” Good research:

- avoids generalities and surveys,
- engages in analysis and adds new ideas to the conversation
- uses a variety of resource types,
- considers multiple viewpoints and avoids bias,
- and evaluates the quality of each cited resource to ensure conclusions are supported by valid evidence.

2. *How do I get started with research?*

Before you begin your research, you must determine what kinds of evidence you need.

Step One: review the assignment to determine if your professor has set specific resource requirements.

- How many resources are required?
- Are *primary* as well as *secondary* sources required?
 - **Primary** sources are either accounts written by individuals who had firsthand knowledge of an incident or are an original document that is the focus of study.
 - **Secondary** sources are interpretations of the primary source.
- Are specific *types* of secondary resources such as commentaries, biographies, or journal articles required?
- Are you told *not* to use a specific resource?

Step Two: determine what resources best fit your chosen topic. Using your research question and thesis statement, ask yourself the following questions:

- What evidence is required to support your argument?
- What individual or organization would create or collect this evidence?
- Where is this evidence most likely to be published? A book, journal article, or the Internet?

Step Three: Begin your search in the appropriate location for the evidence you need:

- library catalogue (books and reference material),
- library databases (journal articles),
- or the Internet where appropriate.

3. *How do I know a resource is trustworthy and appropriate for my topic?*

There are a number of criteria that can be used to evaluate a resource. Take the following into consideration:

- Currency: When was the resource published or created? Check the publication information of the book, journal, or magazine. For webpages, check to see if there is a created date listed on the page. Think about your topic and determine what might make a resource out-of-date.
- Relevance: Is the information in the resource right for your topic? If you are writing a paper on the migration patterns of hammerhead sharks, you do not want a book about whales.
 - Read the introduction and conclusion of a book or the abstract of an article. These short summaries will tell you exactly what the resource is about and will help you avoid resources with limited relevance.
- Accuracy: Are references to other sources included that can verify the author's claims?
- Authority/Authorship: Is the author or publisher credible? If you are unsure, do some background research on the author (what is his/her educational background? Do other scholars recognize him/her as an authority in this area of study?) and/or publisher.
- Purpose: What is the goal of the resource? Is it intended to be objective or does it have a clearly biased agenda?
- For Internet resources: In addition to the above, check the domain of the URL.
 - URLs ending in .com, .org, or .net are generic and can be used by anyone.
 - URLs ending in the following have a higher level of trustworthiness: .edu (educational) and .gov, .us, or gc.ca (American or Canadian government)

Remember to always exercise critical thinking skills regardless of where you find information.

4. *Can I just use Google?*

Google has made it seem like there is only one place to go for information. However, there is no gatekeeping process on Google, and anyone can create a website. Think about the Internet in the context of question #3 above:

- It is harder to find authoritative and accurate information free from bias on Google.
- You can use Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>), which is specifically focused on searching scholarly literature, as a place to get started; but good research will *always* use a variety of resource types. This means going beyond what can be read on the Internet.

The Archibald Library is focused on providing access to *academic scholarship* that has gone through a peer review process, meaning that other individuals, recognized as authorities in their field, have reviewed and vetted the information.

Next up... Using Library Resources

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