

STEPS 2 & 3

STEP 2: EXPLORE YOUR TOPIC: PLAN YOUR SEARCH FOR INFORMATION.

Make a list of topics/keywords you will use in your search for information. They can be used in an internet search, or in a computerized card catalog in the library.

Ex: earthquake (keyword search) earthquake + prediction (Boolean search – some Boolean searches use earthquake + technology AND, OR or NOT instead of + .) earthquake + computer earthquake + simulation. A keyword search is very broad. The keyword "earthquake" may lead you to some good information, but you may also have to sift through hundreds of useless sites. A Boolean search will produce fewer sites, but they'll be more relevant to your topic. Don't forget that you can also conduct your own research on certain topics. For instance, you might interview people knowledgeable in your field, or design and administer a survey.

START YOUR SEARCH

Where can you look for information? Books - do a search in the library's on-line catalog

Periodicals - the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature lists by author and subject all the articles that appeared in several dozen journals and magazines during a given year. Magazines are bound by year and located in the library stacks.

General Encyclopedias - (Britannica, Americana, World Book, etc.) will probably not be detailed enough to use as main sources, but if you need general background information on your topic, they could be helpful.

Specialized Encyclopedias -(Dictionary of American History, Encyclopedia of Psychology, Encyclopedia of World Cultures, etc.) dozens of these encyclopedias cover their fields in much greater depth than a general encyclopedia. If you don't know if there's one for your particular field, ask a reference librarian, or do an internet search, using keywords encyclopedia or dictionary.

Biographical Dictionaries -(Current Biography, Dictionary of American Biography, Who's Who in Economics, etc.) –contain brief accounts of lives and accomplishments of well-known people.

Almanacs -(World Almanac and Book of Facts, Statistical Abstract of the United States, etc.) give facts and statistics that will help you substantiate your claims. Can be very valuable sources.

Internet -use a search engine like Yahoo or Excite.

* A word about Internet sources: Be selective about internet sources you use. Anyone can post anything on a website – the information may or may not be accurate. In general, go with sites of established agencies or groups. For instance, in looking for information on earthquakes, assume the US Geological Survey's site would have more reliable information than "Joe's Earthquake Page."

Here are some questions to ask yourself when evaluating the reliability of internet sites:

Is the information primary or secondary? Is it a researcher's report of his/her findings, or is it a newsgroup discussion of the information?

Who is the author of the page? Is contact information provided? If not, be suspicious.

How well written is the page? Does it look and sound professional?

When the page was last updated? If it doesn't say, you don't know how recent the information is.

Can you verify the information in other sources?

Is there reason to believe the information may be biased? Is the page giving information on the effectiveness or safety of a drug sponsored by the company that manufactures that drug?

Keep a list of books and periodicals that look promising and where you found them in the library (name, author, call number, etc.) Also keep a list of good web sites you find. You may stumble upon a great site by following links from other pages, and then forget how you got to it. Having the web address written down saves you a LOT of time and frustration.

THIS LIST IS YOUR WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

It can easily be done on computer. List these sources in the proper bibliography style suggested by your style manual. The list can then easily be edited to become your final bibliography.

Look for the most recent sources you can find. Most research uses a combination of primary and secondary sources.

Primary research – the researcher gathers facts by going directly to the source itself. A science researcher might set up her own experiment. A history researcher might go directly to courthouse documents, or letters. An archaeology researcher might go directly to a dig site.

Secondary research – the researcher reads about the work that has been done by others in the field.

Combination – a psychology researcher might read about experiments done by others, then set up his own experiment. Don't hesitate to ask a reference librarian for help if: You've looked but you can't find enough information about your topic; You have sources, but you don't know how to locate them in the library (bound periodicals, microfilm, etc.)

COLLECT YOUR INFORMATION: TAKE NOTES FROM YOUR SOURCES

Use index cards. On the top of each card you make for each source, put the bibliography entry information in the correct form OR put a number that will link it to the correct source in your working bibliography. Consult your style manual to see how to do entries for books, periodicals, websites, etc. Put only one piece of information on each card, and include the page number from the source. Keep cards from the same source together (for now). Notetaking does not involve copying! It involves reading, selecting, interpreting, summarizing, paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means summarizing information you've read, not just changing a few words.

Caution: Any direct quote MUST be put in quotation marks and cited in your paper, in an end note or footnote.

Paraphrased information must also be cited. If you don't give proper credit for the thoughts or direct words of others, it's PLAGARISM.

STEP 3 – OUTLINE YOUR INFORMATION. DON'T SKIP THIS STEP!

An outline is a PLAN, and having a plan before you begin will make writing much easier and keep you focused. A skeleton outline might look like this:

- Introduction
- Background Information
- Purpose or Thesis Statement
- Body
 - Point 1 (beginning the proof of the thesis)
 - Supporting evidence
 - Point 2 (building on the first point and continuing the proof)
 - Supporting evidence
 - Point 3 (building on first two points and continuing the proof)
 - Supporting evidence
- Conclusion
 - Restatement of the Purpose or Thesis
 - Statement of Implications or Call to Action