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# Library Research: Step by Step

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## Tips for Successful Research

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<b>Research is a process</b>	The research steps in this guide can be used at any library for most courses.
<b>Make your research interesting</b>	Pick a topic that you are passionate about or will enjoy learning about.
<b>Plan ahead</b>	No library has everything written on every subject. Check early in your search process to see if the material you need is readily available.
<b>Budget your time</b>	You cannot do your best work when you start your assignment the night before it is due. Create a schedule early in the research process.
<b>Avoid Plagiarism</b>	Keep a list of the sources you use and give credit to other people's words and ideas. Style manuals are available in the reference collection to help you.
<b>Help is available if you need it</b>	Reference Librarians are here for you! Library subject guides are also available online and in paper to assist you.

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## Steps in the Information Search Process

### Step 1: Getting Started

- Review your assignment to make sure you understand it.
- If you have any questions about your assignment, consult your instructor.
- Think about your assignment.
  - ✓ Make a list of several broad (general) topics that interest you.
  - ✓ Plan and schedule time to research your topic, write your paper or prepare your presentation, proofread, etc.

### Step 2: Choosing your topic

- Discuss a list of possible topics with your instructor.
- See if there are library materials available on each of your broad topics. Note: If your topic is too current or too specific there may not be enough information available for you to develop an adequate research project.
- Pick the best possible broad topic by considering:
  - ✓ assignment requirements
  - ✓ your personal interests
  - ✓ availability of materials on the topic
  - ✓ time you need to complete your assignment

### **Step 3: Exploring your topic**

- Examine your attitudes, biases, and knowledge of your topic. Identify what you would like to learn about it.
- Read about your topic to get an overview of it.
- Explore your topic to discover possible themes that may serve as a focus for your assignment.
  - ✓ As you go along jot down specialized terms, buzzwords, concepts, authors, titles or other items you may want to check later.
  - ✓ As you are working, browse the shelves for additional material on your topic.
  - ✓ Keep a list of the sources you use. You may need to retrace your steps.
- List several possible focuses (aspects of your topic).

### **Step 4: Focusing your topic**

- Select a single theme, problem, issue, or question associated with your topic.
- If your topic is still too broad consider limiting to:
  - ✓ a specific population, gender, ethnic group, etc.
  - ✓ a particular geographic location
  - ✓ a specific time period
- Try to predict the success of each focused topic. Remember to consider:
  - ✓ assignment requirements
  - ✓ your personal interests
  - ✓ quality and quantity of materials available on the topic
  - ✓ time you need to complete your assignment

### **Step 5: Gathering information**

- Make a thorough search of various types of library materials; collect information which defines, expands, and supports your focus.
  - ✓ Use information from the encyclopedias, dictionaries, books, editorial and news summaries, etc. that you have already consulted.
  - ✓ Check library catalogs for the authors and titles cited in subject bibliographies, encyclopedias, and books.
  - ✓ Add information gathered from newspaper, magazine, or journal articles.
  - ✓ Use primary sources such as letters, diaries, speeches, interviews, etc., when appropriate.
  - ✓ Watch for special materials such as maps, pictures, photographs, charts, statistics, etc., if they are applicable to your project.
- Be selective; analyze and evaluate your sources. Consider the biases and scholarly reputation of the author, currency of the material, supporting documentation, etc.

**The model for this process is based the research of Dr. Carol C. Kuhlthau, Rutgers University.**

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