Library Research Basics:
From Getting Started to Locating that Perfect Resource

PRIOR TO BEGINNING YOUR RESEARCH

Most research projects involve locating information from multiple sources in order to support a point of view on a particular topic. Few people research a topic as broad as "teenagers." Instead, teenagers will become part of a more complex topic like teenage psychology, teenage drivers, or teenagers' use of social media, etc.

To complicate matters, different authors will use different words to describe the same or similar topics. For example, when writing about teenagers, authors might use young adults, teens, adolescent, or adolescents, etc.

Before you start to search for information, do some brainstorming. Try to think of as many ways to describe your topic as possible. Consider synonyms, related concepts, and variant forms of each of your keywords and/or concepts.

It is helpful to write your terms into a grid like the example below. The first row has been filled in as an example. Use the other row to write down your research topic, thesis statement, or research question and then use the columns to list your main keywords and their related concepts. Add to the list as you discover new keywords being used to describe your topic.

Sample Topics	First Concept	Second Concept	Third Concept

What is homelessness?
 	
What is the relationship between homelessness and mental illness?
 	
It is the government's responsibility to provide shelter and food to the homeless.
	Homelessness
	Homeless
	Emergency
	  Housing
	Homeless
	  Shelters
	Homeless
	  Families
		Mental Illness
		Schizophrenia
		Borderline
		  Personality
		Psychiatric
		  Disorder
		Mentally Ill
			Programs
			Federal
			Law; Statutes
			Federal Aid
			Government
			  Policy
			Salvation Army
			Soup Kitchens

Your Topic	First Concept	Second Concept	Third Concept

STEP ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Encyclopedias, dictionaries and handbooks are a good starting point for any research project. Typically these resources provide a brief overview of the topic, terminology, and basic facts and data. The library owns many general and subject specific print and digital reference books. Print reference books include the prefix R in their call number and digitized reference books can be found through the library's webpage/research portal.

STEP TWO: BUILD ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

Books cover virtually any topic -- fact or fiction. Use a book to look for comprehensive information on a topic, identify how your topic is related to other important ideas, or locate historical information. The library's online catalog can be accessed from the library's webpage. Local public and university library catalogs and free eBooks can be accessed from the library's webpage/research portal/eBook tab.

Title   Author   Call Number

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STEP THREE: KEEP IT CURRENT

Magazine, academic journal, and newspaper articles can be used to locate information on current topics, case studies and research reports and to update information on more established topics. In addition to the print magazines and newspapers available in the library, many of our research databases include the full-text of the articles they index. Our research databases can be access on campus or from home by going to the library webpage/research portal.

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