

The Successful Research Process

Source: Teaching Information Literacy / Burkhardt et al. Chicago: ALA, 2003. p20.

Keys to Your Success

Research is always a multi-step process.
Research is often interdisciplinary.
Think broadly about your topic, then narrow and refine the focus.
Keep a record of everything you find and where and how you find it.

Steps to Your Success

IDENTIFY YOUR TOPIC

The topic is the idea that you are researching.
Example: Pollution in the ocean.
Brainstorm and concept-map the topic.
Think about and visualize your topic from many different angles.
Note related and interrelated topics.
Note terminology and synonyms that can broaden your searching power.
State your topic as a question. *Example:* How does pollution affect the ocean?
Refine the question. *Example:* How does oil pollution affect marine life in the ocean?
Identify key concepts and list synonyms for them.
Example: ocean, seawater; pollution, oil spills; marine life, organisms, biology, plants, animals, fish, mammals; impact
List disciplines or subject areas that relate to part of your research. *Example:* oceanography, environment and life sciences, fisheries, natural resources, marine affairs, biology, aquaculture, business

GATHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Get a broad overview of the subject or topic.
Use both general and subject-specific encyclopedias and dictionaries.

Get more focused, in-depth, or historical background on the topic.
Use books written in the time period and follow up with more recent information.

FOCUS YOUR RESEARCH

Gather up-to-date, current information on the topic.
Use appropriate periodical information from popular, trade, and scholarly sources.
Use high-quality, appropriate web sites.
Gather in-depth, focused information on the topic.
Search for research studies, surveys, and experiments about your topic.

EVALUATE YOUR SOURCES

Does the author have authority on the topic?
What are the author's credentials?
Is the information accurate for when it was written?
Is there a consensus of opinion on this topic?
What are the important ideas?
What is the purpose of the source? How will it impact your research?
Is the purpose to inform, to entertain, to teach, or to influence?
Who is the author writing for? Is it biased in any way?
Has the author looked at the material objectively?
Does the author offer several points of view?
How does the source help answer your research question?
Does the source provide valuable, relevant information?
Does the source answer a part of the total research question?