

The Seven Steps of the Research Process

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC.

STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

STEP 3: USE CATALOGUE TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA.

STEP 4: USE ARTICLE DATABASES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

STEP 5: FIND INTERNET RESOURCES

STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND

STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT

Permission to adapt this web site, originally developed by the Reference Department; Instruction, Research, and Information Services (IRIS); Cornell University Library, is gratefully acknowledged.

The following seven steps outline a simple and effective strategy for finding information for a research paper and documenting the sources you find. Depending on your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps. Adapt this outline to your needs.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC.

SUMMARY: State your topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?" Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question.

[More details on how to identify and develop your topic.](#)

STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

SUMMARY: Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopaedias. Read articles in these encyclopaedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopaedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

[More suggestions on how to find background information.](#)

STEP 3: USE CATALOGUE TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA.

SUMMARY: Use keyword searching for a narrow or complex search topic. Use subject searching for a broad subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, date, etc.) and the item location information (call number). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan through the bibliography for additional sources.

Finding media (audio and video) titles.

[More detailed instructions for using the library catalogue.](#)

STEP 4: USE ARTICLE DATABASES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

SUMMARY: Use the online Article Databases to find citations to articles.

Choose the database that is best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk if you need help figuring out which database will be best.

You can find periodical articles by the article author, title, or keyword. If the full text is not linked in the online database you are using, write or print out the citation from the online database and search for the title of the periodical in the Library Catalogue (OPAC). The OPAC lists the print, microform, and electronic versions of periodicals at Vanier.

How to find and use online periodical indexes at Vanier.

STEP 5: FIND INTERNET RESOURCES

SUMMARY: Use search engines and subject directories to locate materials on the Web. Check with your instructor to see if your class has a bibliography or research guide created by your instructor.

How to find information on the Internet.

STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND

SUMMARY: See How to Critically Analyse Information Sources and Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-Scholarly Periodicals: Use these criteria for suggestions on evaluating the authority and quality of the books and articles you located. If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. Check with a reference librarian or your instructor.

When you're ready to write, check how to organize, format, and write your paper.

http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tlc/writeguide/Sect_5-Sect_8/Section_vi.htm

STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources.

Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to locate the sources that you have listed as references. See Failing to Document http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tlc/writeguide/Sect_9-Sect_10/Section_x.htm

Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism. (See Vanier's Academic Policies). http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/acadean/P_index.html

Use one of the styles listed below or another style approved by your instructor.

Handouts summarizing the APA and MLA styles are available at the Reference Desk.

Available online:

Format the citations in your bibliography using examples from [Citation Style Guides](http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/litc/styleguides.html)
<http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/litc/styleguides.html>

Available in print (book) format:

Gibaldi, Joseph. [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers](#). 6th ed. New York: MLA, 2003. (Ref/LB/2369/G53/2003)

This handbook is based on the MLA Style Manual (Ref PN 147/G444/ 1998) and is intended as an aid for college students writing research papers. Included here is information on selecting a topic, researching the topic, note taking, the writing of footnotes and bibliographies, as well as a sample pages of a research paper. Useful for the beginning researcher.

[Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#). 5th ed. Washington: APA, 2001. (Ref BF 76.7 /P83/ 2001)

The authoritative style manual for anyone writing in the field of psychology. Useful for the social sciences generally. Chapters discuss the content and organization of a manuscript, writing style, the American Psychological Association citation style, and typing.

If you are writing an annotated bibliography, see [How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography](#).

RESEARCH TIPS:

WORK FROM THE GENERAL TO THE SPECIFIC.

Find background information first, then use more specific and recent sources.

RECORD WHAT YOU FIND AND WHERE YOU FOUND IT.

Write out a complete citation for each source you find; you may need it again later.

TRANSLATE YOUR TOPIC INTO THE SUBJECT LANGUAGE OF THE CATALOGUE (OPAC) AND ARTICLE DATABASES YOU USE.

Check your topic words against a thesaurus or browse subject heading list.

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