

# The Research Process

- Step One: Identify and Develop your topic and research question
  - Topic=Broadly defined subject area
  - Research question=narrower focus of the topic
- WHY are you researching? Clarify your needs.
- Suggestions for picking a topic and a research question:
  - Discuss with your professor or classmates
  - Identify something that you are passionate about, possibly the reason you wanted to attend school
  - Scan professional and trade publications for current trends on your TOPIC, and select a RESEARCH QUESTION based on that.

Topic:

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Research Question:

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Highlight the NOUNS or major ideas from this question. These will be your first KEYWORDS.

KEYWORDS:

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Now, think of synonyms for these words. What is a simple way to describe your question? How can you describe your main keywords in the fewest number of words? What words would the people who study your topic use to describe it? You will do more of this in steps 2 and 3.

More KEYWORDS:

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● **Step Two: Develop an overview of the topic**

- Do background research on the topic—find out what you can about your topic. It will help you answer your research question if you know the full context.
- Do background research on the different parts of your research question.
- Refine your research question—you may have picked a question that is very general and you need to make it more specific.
- **Note words used frequently as you are doing your overview**
- **Useful sources for Step 2:** Subject encyclopedias and dictionaries, Trade publications and Journals, Textbooks, Literature Reviews, Bibliographies, works cited pages, and recommended readings

Refined Topic:

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Refined Research Question:

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New KEYWORDS:

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● **Step Three: Locate Resources**

- **Books:** Use these mostly for background information, history, overviews—
  - **What to Search:** Use your broader terms (topic keywords) to search catalogs for books.
  - **Where to Search:** Library Catalogs (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the Library), Amazon (to find titles), WorldCat (to find other libraries that have the book you want)
- **Journal Article:** In-depth topic research, Academic research and experiment results
  - **What to Search:** Use the KEYWORDS you selected in steps 1 and 2
  - **Where to Search:** Databases, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Library

- **Tips for searching for articles are below, in the Database Searching Section!**
- Trade Article: Good for getting a feel of professional opinions in the field, book reviews, literature reviews
  - What to Search: Use the KEYWORDS you selected in steps 1 and 2
  - Where to Search: Databases, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Library
- Magazine Article: Current interest, information for general public, pop-culture
  - What to Search: Use the KEYWORDS you selected in steps 1 and 2
  - Where to Search: Databases, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Library
- Web Page: Varied-everything from scholarly-level research to pop-culture
  - What to Search: Use the KEYWORDS you selected in steps 1 and 2
  - Where to Search: Google, Other search engines, known sources
  - Evaluate pages based on Currency, Reliability and Reputation of the publisher, Author's credentials, Accuracy of information, and Purpose.

### **Database Searching**

- Step 1: Select your database
  - Academic Search Complete
  - Subject Specific Databases
    - ERIC-Education
    - PsycArticles-Psychology
    - SocIndex-Sociology
    - Business Source Complete-Business
- Step 2: Try the terms you picked in steps 1 and 2 of the Research Process
  - Take the KEYWORDS you selected in Step 1 and 2 and use them for your search terms.
  - As you start reading articles in your subject, you will notice other words are used, too. Keep track of these as your new KEYWORDS.

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- Step 3: Modify your search
  - Go Broader or Narrower
    - Try a Narrower Term if you are getting too many results.
    - Try a Broader Term if you are getting too few results
    - Example: KEYWORD 1: Star Wars
    - A BROADER term: Science Fiction Movies
    - A NARROWER Term: Luke Skywalker
  - Boolean Operators
    - Use the word AND to connect two KEYWORDS
      - Example: Luke Skywalker AND Darth Vader
    - Use the word OR when a term could be called something else
      - Example: Darth Vader OR Anakin Skywalker
    - Use the word NOT when you want to Exclude an idea
      - Example: Luke Skywalker NOT Princess Leia
  
- **Step Four: Frustration**
  - Are you getting way too many results, none of which look like they could answer your question? Your search is too broad. Try to pick more specific or clearer terms.
  - Are you not getting any results? Your search is too narrow. Try to use a broader term, or try to research each aspect of your research question separately. You may need to discuss the research question with your professor to decide ways to make it a broader search.
  - Are you only finding materials the library doesn't have? Request an Interlibrary Loan or ask a librarian for help with your search.
  - Try to look through the Works Cited pages in your textbook to get ideas of where the authors did their research, the terms they used, and topics/research questions that are common in your field.
  - Get help: [reference@txwes.edu](mailto:reference@txwes.edu)

- Step Five: Re-search
  - Evaluate what you have already and what you need (evaluate for completeness)
  - Fill in gaps in your research
  - This is mostly a step to lookup little facts, statistics, or definitions to properly answer your research question.
  
- Step Six: Synthesize
  - Extract the useful information and determine how it will be used in your paper, evaluate for content
  - This is the step in which you write your paper.
  - You get help with the writing process from your professors or from the Academic Success Center, located on the first floor of the library.
  
- Step Seven: Cite
  - Keep citation notes throughout your research to make this step easier
  - For every source you find, get as much of the following information you can:
    - Authors' names.
    - Publication Date or last updated date
    - Title of Article, Title of Journal, magazine, web page, or book
    - Volume and issue (for periodicals)
    - Publication information: publisher name and city, for books; database name for periodicals
    - URL (for web pages) DOI (for periodicals) and Date accessed (for anything online)
  - Include only information you cite in your paper in your Works Cited page.
  - Indicate in the text of your paper when you are citing another author, even if it not a direct quote. Cite quotes, ideas, statistics, summaries, paraphrasing, and facts that are not commonly known.
  - Use the citation style required by your professor. Style manuals are available in the Reference Collection of the library and on the library's web page.