



"Information You Can Trust"

Alverno College Library

# Research Strategies

**Research:** the diligent, thorough inquiry and investigation into a subject requiring time and effort. Includes relevant information from ALL appropriate print and electronic resources available. **Reference librarians** can assist you with research.

## RESEARCH TIPS!

- State your topic as a question. For example, "How does DDT affect wildlife?"
- Identify main concepts and **keywords** that are important to your topic
- Use the **right source** for your question! The Internet is only one place to search!
  - Use **reference books** to obtain background information
  - Use library **catalogs**, e.g., TOPCAT to search for **books**
  - Use **databases**, e.g., PsychINFO to find **journal articles**; articles generally contain more specific and recent information
- Keep a **record** of what you find and where you find it
  - Record the **complete citation** for each source (needed for **bibliography**)

## Library terms to know:

**Abstract:** A brief **summary** of the contents of an article or book.

**Bibliography:** A **list of citations** for books, articles or other materials.

**Citation:** **Information that fully identifies a publication:** usually includes author, title, name of journal (if the citation is to an article) or publisher (if to a book), and date; volume, issue # and pages if to an article.

**Database:** An **organized collection of information;** data or citations often stored in electronic format and searchable by computer.

**Keywords:** Most **significant words** in a topic, book or article, etc. Keywords are useful in searching databases and library catalogs.

**Online catalog:** A **searchable, computerized database** of materials owned by a library that displays the call # and location. Our online catalog is called **TOPCAT**.

**Stacks:** **Bookshelves** containing the circulating collection of a library. Our library has stacks on all four floors.

**Subject headings:** Standardized **words or phrases** assigned to books and articles and used to arrange these items by topic. Subject headings are used in library catalogs or indexes **to describe** the **contents** of a book, article, etc.

**RESEARCH TASK**

**STRATEGIES**

**TIPS**

**Identify a topic**

**State your topic as a question, e.g., what is the effect of television violence on children?**

**Identify main keywords or concepts in your question, e.g., television, children, violence.**

**Focus your topic**

**Make sure your topic is not too general or too specific.**

**What time period are you interested in? Do you only want research articles?**

**Find background information**

**Refer to encyclopedias for an overview of the topic. Use dictionaries to look up unfamiliar terms.**

**Note any special vocabulary used in your topic.**

**Prepare to search**

**Identify appropriate research tools.**

**Consulting a librarian will improve your effectiveness in finding information.**

**Find books for overview and history of topic**

**Search TOPCAT by keyword or subject heading.**

**If you find the “perfect” book, “search” its subject headings.**

**Find articles for current information**

**Search databases or indexes best suited to your topic. We have 30+ on our electronic database page.**

**Record complete citations for your bibliography. (see other side)**

**Need more information?**

**Examine other sources, e.g., WWW, maps, atlases, statistics, etc.**

**Ask a librarian; she/he is a professional info-seeker.**

**Evaluate your information**

**Is the source relevant? Current? Does it answer your research question?**

**This task is ongoing when writing a research paper.**

**Write your paper**

**Use an approved style manual to document your sources.**

**If you have engaged in all stages of the research process, writing your paper will be easier and faster.**