Composition Research Guide

I. Find Books

A) Reference Materials: Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, etc.
Reference materials offer background information and broad overviews of subjects. This information is often helpful in narrowing your topic and in selecting a specific area to explore further. Reference materials such as almanacs and yearbooks also provide quick access to statistical data.

1) Suggested Titles:

- **Encyclopaedia Brittanica Online.** Online version of one of the world’s most popular encyclopedias featuring many research tools including:
  - A-Z Browse
  - Biography Browse
  - Magazine Browse
  - Primary Sources
  - Media Collection
  - Timelines

- **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.** New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2016. (REF LB 2369.G53 2016) Provides information on all aspects of writing a research paper, including finding a topic, evaluating and citing sources, and using proper grammar, style, and formatting, with emphasis on MLA style documentation.


B) Library Catalog: Print and E-book Collections

The online catalog offers convenient access to titles housed at all VC library locations. At the catalog screen, select “Search the Catalog” to locate titles or subjects that match your terms such as “Iraq War.”

**E-books:** To search only for titles available electronically, from the “Search the Catalog” page, select “Online” as the desired location. Use the dropdown menu to choose your search method (author, subject terms, etc), then enter your search term (ex. global warming).

*Helpful feature:* While viewing a book, select the “Search” tab to bring up a search bar which will allow you to locate a word or phrase within the entire content of the book.

C) Browse the Collection

Physically browse titles shelved by call number in the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) ranges containing your research topic. The LCC system organizes books by subject into one of 21 broad categories identified by a letter of the alphabet. For example, books on “aging in America” are located in the “H” section, Social Sciences. The complete LCC outline is available [here](#).

II. Find Articles

A) Article Databases: These may be searched 24/7 from any internet connection. They are available both on and off campus.

1. **Academic Search Complete:** This database searches numerous journals to offer full text articles on nearly all subjects. Select from a number of different limiters to customize your search, including cover stories, publication dates, page numbers, etc.

   *Citing the articles:* The database offers formatting rules with examples for citing the articles selected. For assistance in citing the articles, select the “Help” link in the upper right corner of the screen, scroll to view “Citation Styles” in the left menu bar, and then choose the documentation style of your choice.

2. **CQ Researcher:** This award-winning database features 44 yearly reports offering in-depth coverage of current issues and topics. Coverage includes a pro-con feature, statistical data with tables and graphs, and a bibliography with related articles and books.
Citing the Reports: The database will automatically generate a citation in a style of your choice (APA, MLA, etc.) Select the "Cite Now!" link from the top menu bar within an article to generate a customized citation.

3. Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center: Provides a wealth of information on current issues and controversial topics. Information includes pro-con essays, journal articles, statistics, primary sources, and links to multimedia files. The database also provides assistance in citing the information selected.

B) Newspaper Databases

1. Newspaper Source: Provides cover-to-cover full-text coverage of more than 40 (U.S.) and international newspapers. The database also contains selective full text for 389 regional (U.S.) papers. In addition, full-text television & radio news transcripts are also included.

III. Suggested Websites

A Guide for Writing Research Papers Based on MLA Documentation: MLA style research paper in PDF format with notes in the margins regarding formatting, in-text citations, block quotes, and multiple examples of various Works Cited sources and tips.

Plagiarism: What it is and How to Avoid It: Recognizing what constitutes plagiarism, along with strategies to avoid it.

How to Write a Research Paper: This page lists eight stages involved in writing a library-based research paper. Although this list suggests that there is a simple, linear process to writing such a paper, the actual process of writing a research paper is often a messy and recursive one, so please use this outline as a flexible guide.

Choosing and Narrowing a Topic: This guide will help you understand how to efficiently and effectively do basic research. From basic research, finding and narrowing a topic, finding articles, finding book and print sources, evaluating credibility, accessing and storing your sources to citing your sources.

PORT-Penn Online Research Tutorial: Contents include: working with topics; types of information; sources of information; locating information; evaluating information; and proper scholarly documentation methods.

The Research Process

1) Select a topic that you find interesting and appropriate for the assignment.

2) Review reference sources such as subject encyclopedias for background information to help focus or narrow the search.

   For example, students interested in global warming may consult the Encyclopedia Britannica for a general overview of the topic and for ideas in narrowing the focus to a specific area of interest such as how the use of alternative fuels can prevent global warming.

3) Restate the topic as a question. Inquiry is at the heart of the research process, a quest to locate information which answers questions and leads researchers to a greater understanding of the topic.

   Restating the topic as a question will help in:
   - Locating information that is useful and relevant to the primary focus or thesis of your research.
   - Identifying the keywords or phrases to use in the search statement.

   Example: How can the use of alternative fuels prevent climate change?

4) Develop a search statement by combining keywords or concepts from the research question. For example, “alternative fuels” and “climate change” were identified as keywords in the question above. By connecting one or more terms with the Boolean operator “and”, the researcher will retrieve only those articles that discuss both concepts, thus improving the relevancy of the search.

   Enter in search field: alternative fuels and climate change

5) Develop alternate search statements to improve the search results. Authors may use various terms to describe the same concept.

   For example, climate change is often used in the same context as global warming.

   By identifying and connecting alternate terms, researchers may expand the search results. As indicated below, consider brainstorming and listing synonyms or word variations to identify alternate keywords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>global warming</td>
<td>alternative fuels</td>
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<tr>
<td>greenhouse effect</td>
<td>renewable energy sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climate change</td>
<td>sustainable energy sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>ozone layer</td>
<td>fossil fuels</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6) Evaluate information for objectivity and reliability.

7) Cite the information borrowed from other authors or informational sources. Careful documentation will ensure that credit is given with no intention to plagiarize or claim ownership of information belonging to other researchers. For explanations and examples of how to cite information from a variety of formats, visit the Duke University Library’s Citation page.

Questions?

Email: librarian@vernoncollege.edu
Chat: “Ask the Librarian” link on the Library homepage.
Phone: 940-552-6291 ext: 2222