

The Research Process

The research process detailed below serves as a guide to produce quality research papers and speeches. Depending on the nature of your project, you may need to adapt the process to suit your needs.

Step 1: Identify and Develop Your Topic

- Choosing an appropriate topic may be the most difficult part of an assignment. If you are struggling to come up with a topic, try getting ideas from the following library databases:
 - [Issues and Controversies](#)
 - [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#)
 - [CQ Researcher](#)
- Narrow and refine your topic: topics that are too broad may need to be narrowed. The requirements for the research assignment will dictate how broad or narrow your topic must be:
 - Eating disorders (broad topic)
 - Eating disorders in athletes (more narrow topic)
 - Eating disorders in college athletes (even more narrow topic)
- Begin identifying the keywords and concepts of your topic. Also be thinking about possible synonyms for your keywords:
 - **Topic:** Are eating disorders prevalent in college athletes?
 - **Keywords:** **eating disorders, college, athletes**
 - **Possible Synonyms:** **eating disorders** (anorexia, bulimia), **college** (university), **athletes** (athletics, sports)

Step 2: Find Background Information

- Consult reference sources to obtain background information on any topic that you are unfamiliar with. There are dozens of subject specific encyclopedias and handbooks - both print and online - that will provide concise information to help get you started (i.e. the *Encyclopedia of Psychology*).
 - Specialized encyclopedias are available in each campus library reference collection.
 - Full text, online encyclopedias are available from the CSN Library web site in [netLibrary](#), [Oxford Reference Online](#), and the [Gale Virtual Reference Library](#).

- **Tip:** most encyclopedias will have a list of additional information sources at the end of each article, make note of these.

Step 3: Use the Catalog to Find Books and Media

- Use a **keyword** search if your topic is narrow, complex, or very current.
- Use a **subject** search for broader topics.
- Don't feel compelled to read an entire book - you may only need to read a few pages or perhaps a chapter.
- You may also search our collection of full text electronic books by accessing the **netLibrary** collection.

Step 4: Use Databases to Find Magazine and Journal Articles

- There are two basic types of databases - general and subject specific - choose one that is appropriate for your topic. For example, if you are researching eating disorders, you will probably choose a subject specific database such as *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection*.
- Most databases support both keyword and subject searching - choose the best method for your topic.
- Take advantage of the limiting features available in most databases to make your searches more effective. You may limit to full text articles or scholarly journals (if required for an assignment), for example.

Step 5: Locate Internet Resources

- Use a directory (such as the [Librarian's Internet Index](#)) for broad queries, or where quality is preferred over quantity. A good directory will evaluate web sites for quality information.
- Use a search engine (such as [Google](#)) for narrow, complex searches, or where the quantity of web sites is important.

Step 6: Evaluate Your Sources of Information

- Evaluate the quality of the information you have found in books and magazines/journals. Is the information scholarly enough for your topic?
- Be especially critical of information found on the web.
- Ask these basic questions to begin evaluating your information:
 - Who publishes/produces the information? Look for any potential biases.

- Who is the author? Are the author's qualifications/credentials stated?
- Are sources of information cited? Sources of information used should be clearly documented.
- When was the information published? Is the information current? Is it important that the information be current?

Step 7: Properly Cite Your Sources of Information

- Be sure to give appropriate credit to the sources of information you used for your research.
 - Cite your sources when you directly quote information or paraphrase.
 - Use standard style guides or one that is specified by your instructor (i.e. [MLA](#) or [APA](#)).
 - Avoid plagiarism - when in doubt, document.
 - If you are having trouble with your "work cited" or "reference" page, see a librarian or visit the writing center.