



Victor Valley College Library

## RESEARCH TIPS

**Tip #1: Do Not Begin Your Research with the Internet!** Students often begin their research with an Internet search that produces an overwhelming number of results and a feeling of frustration. Before beginning your research, it is useful to design a search strategy using the resources available to you in the library (both online and print). The steps outlined below will help you focus your research and locate relevant sources for writing your paper.

### Define the Topic

- What is your specific topic? What is the main idea of the paper?
- If possible, try to find a topic that interests you.
- Write down your topic and the related issues using keywords, phrases, or complete sentences.
- Brainstorm, but try to be specific in identifying and narrowing your topic.

### Identify the Type of Information Needed

- What types of information do you need -- books, scholarly journals, magazine articles, newspaper articles, or Internet sites?
- How many sources do you need?
- Do you need historical or current information?
- What is the purpose of the assignment? Do you need to argue a position on a topic, expand your knowledge of a subject, provide comparative information or present different points of view?

### Getting Started

**Note: All references to the “Library catalog,” “Databases,” and “Online sources,” are accessed through the library’s website @ <http://www.vvc.edu/library>**

Whether your instructor has assigned a topic or you choose one yourself, an effective way to start your research is with a source that presents an overview and identifies specific issues to help you narrow your topic. This will enable you to focus your topic while providing valuable background information for continuing your research. The library subscribes to two online databases that are useful in this respect:

- ***CQ Researcher\**** is a weekly publication that covers a broad spectrum of topics, often controversial. Each week focuses on a particular topic and typically includes an overview, background, historical timeline, pro/con arguments, and more. Use the Pro/Con link for an A-Z listing of major topics.

- ***Opposing Viewpoints In Context***\* is a "one-stop" resource for information on controversial social issues. The database provides access to viewpoints articles, topic overviews, statistics, links to websites, and full-text magazines, journal, and newspapers articles.

**\*See note below concerning passwords for off-campus database access.**

Two additional print series useful for getting started are ***Taking Sides*** and ***Information Plus*** (both located near the Reference Desk). These multi-volume series present current information on a broad range of subjects and controversial issues. *Taking Sides* includes an overview of each issue followed by pro and con articles (See Keyword Index). *Information Plus* is a good source for background information and often provides statistics and charts to incorporate into your research.

The library also has a Web page on **Hot Topics** for further information on sources for controversial issues.

Once you have identified a topic and the issues you plan to focus on, you may find it necessary to clarify certain aspects (people, places, terminology) before continuing your research.

**Reference books** (subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks) are valuable for this purpose and can sometimes provide more detailed information than available on the Internet. Reference sources often include overviews or historical perspectives, define special terms, and identify key events, dates or people related to your topic. (The Reference collection, located on the main floor of the library, is searchable through the library Catalog.)

### **Search for Sources (continuing your research)**

- Use the keywords that describe your topic to start your search for information.
- Search the **library Catalog** for books, reference books, CDs, or DVDs in the library's collection.
- Search the **online Databases** to locate articles in magazines, academic journals, and newspapers. The library subscribes to databases covering a variety of disciplines including art, biology, health, law, music, philosophy, politics, and religion. The primary databases for general research are:
  - ***Academic OneFile***\* is the library's primary database for locating magazine and academic journal articles. The database indexes over 13,000 titles dating from 1980 to present, over 5,000 in full-text.
  - ***NewsBank Access World News***\* provides full-text articles from major U.S. and International newspapers. The database is useful when searching for information on state and local issues.

**\*NOTE:** To access databases from off-campus you must first register for a Username and Password. Database access is limited to currently enrolled VVC students, faculty and staff.

If you are using Internet sources, try starting with the Internet Resources page of Web sites recommended by the college librarians. Subject directories such as **Infomine** (infomine.ucr.edu) or **ipl2** (www.ipl.org) are also useful for finding Web sites on specific subjects. Librarians have evaluated these sites for accuracy, currency, authority and objectivity before being included in the directories.

## Evaluate the Results

Organize the resources you have found to make sure that you have enough information and that the sources are relevant to your topic. Use a critical eye to evaluate the information you find. Some criteria to consider include:

### Authority

- Who is the author?
- Is the author a specialist in the field?

### Accuracy

- Is the information accurate and complete?
- Is it consistent with other information you have found?

### Objectivity

- Does the source provide a neutral perspective of the topic or is it biased toward a particular point of view?
- Was it produced in association with a special interest group?

### Date of Publication

- How current is the information?
- Is current information important for your topic, or do you need historical information?

### Coverage

- Is the source comprehensive for the topic?
- Does it present multiple viewpoints?

### Usefulness

- Does the source include a table of contents, an index, or bibliography?
- Does it include tables, charts, graphs, maps, illustrations or photographs to support the topic?

## Cite Your Sources

As your research progresses, be sure to keep a detailed list of all sources (publication information, search dates, etc.) you intend to use in your paper. You will need this information for the "In-text citations" and bibliography or "Works Cited" list to document your research. The works cited list includes a citation for each source used to write your paper. The citation format is in a consistent style according to one of several standard citation formats. Two of the most common formats for college research papers are the **MLA (Modern Language Association)** (LB 2369 G53 2009) and the **APA (American Psychological Association)** (BF76.7 .P83 2010) styles. Always check with your instructors for format and citation requirements.

The librarians have created a **condensed version** for both the MLA and APA formats based on the most commonly used resources in the VVC library. The condensed version is especially useful when citing full-text articles from Expanded Academic ASAP and other online databases. Additional information regarding when and why to cite sources is located under "**Understanding Plagiarism**" (See under "Research Tools" on the library's website.)

## Ask for Help!

- If you need help finding additional sources of information or need assistance with the library's electronic resources, please ask at the **Reference Desk**. A reference librarian is available during all open hours.
- If you have specific questions regarding writing a research paper or essay, the **Writing Center** staff is available to assist you (Building #21 - Room # 177)