

## Writing and Humanities Tutoring Center



### Researching for Papers

Anyone who has ever done a Google search has actually engaged in an act of research! But, college research is often viewed as being a difficult and inaccessible act. Here are some tips and tools to help.

#### Questions before you get started

- What citation style is being required - MLA, APA, Chicago, or any other style?
- What specific kinds of sources does the assignment require?
- How many sources does the assignment require?
- How old can your research be?
- Is the research relevant and appropriate to your assignment?
- What are some of the important historical events that occurred around the time the research was published?

#### Making a list of key words

- Spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming a list of key words and phrases. Don't think about what works or doesn't. Just write a list of any and every word or phrase that might be helpful in conducting a search for relevant texts. You can add or narrow your search as you go.

#### Finding Sources – The library, databases, and other online sources

- What are peer-reviewed journal articles?
  - Articles that have been reviewed by others in the field and have passed scrutiny.
  - Often required in college level courses
  - Found in library online databases (including the SMC library).
  - Popular library databases: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, JSTOR, and many more in every academic discipline.
- How do I find them?
  - Go to the SMC Library homepage and try typing in one of your key words or phrases right into the "One Search" bar in the middle of the page.
  - If you are not finding what you need, you can go to "Refine your results" on the left side of the page and narrow your search to peer-reviewed sources.
  - Mix and match your key words!
    1. Try putting quotes around the words, then try without quotes
    2. Go to "Advanced Search" and try the words with different combinations of the drop down words: "AND", "OR", "NOT"
  - Once you click on an article, read the abstract to make sure it will be helpful and relevant before trying to download the article and reading the entire thing.
  - Look to see if the abstract also provides a list of relevant key words you can add to your list.

- “Pin” or save articles you think will work so that you don’t forget about them.
  - Click on the “Ask a Librarian” feature to chat with a librarian and get immediate help.
  - Go to the Writing Center and asking for help with research.
- What about websites and other online sources?
    - Wikipedia cannot be used as a source, but can be a good starting point for your ideas. Check out the references found at the bottom of a Wikipedia article.
    - Google Scholar is helpful but BEWARE! A paywall often prevents you from accessing full articles. But you can use “Ask a Librarian” to find the full text.
    - Note that there are many websites that pretend or claim to have a better reputation than they actually do and, therefore might be unusable or useless for writing a strong research paper.
    - Is the source authoritative? Clear? Is the argument and interpretation sound? Does the information of the source serve a purpose in the scope of your research? Are they trying to sell you something?
    - Look out for misspellings, grammatical errors, confusing language, logical fallacies, and anything else that would discredit the source.

### **Keeping Track of Sources**

- Make sure you have all the necessary information – author, name of article, journal, website, book, YouTube video, publication dates, and any other important publication information.
- Create a Works Cited/ Bibliography/References page as you go. Don’t wait until you have a full draft to start properly tracking and citing your sources. It is a huge waste of time and causes mistakes and oversights.
- Make sure to follow the specific requirements of the style you are using. Be consistent.
- For electronic sources, even those that do not seem to have an author or a date, a link to the source is simply not enough!
- While it is often convenient and tempting to use citation generators like citation machine, son of citation, or even a resource website’s own in-house citation generator, you should always double check with a trusted source such as OWL Purdue or a handbook. The generators are usually incorrect in some way.
- It never hurts to ask your professor, librarian, or tutor for help double-checking both your in-text and bibliographic citations.