

The following seven steps outline a simple and effective strategy for finding information for a research paper and documenting the sources you find. Depending on your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps. Adapt this outline to your needs. We are ready to help you at every step in your research.

### **STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC**

**SUMMARY:** State your topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?" Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question.

### **STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY:** Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopedias. Read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

### **STEP 3: USE CATALOGS TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA**

**SUMMARY:** Use guided keyword searching to find materials by topic or subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the location information (call number and library). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject; they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area. Check the standard subject subheading "--BIBLIOGRAPHIES," or titles beginning with Annual Review of... in the Cornell Library Classic Catalog.

### **STEP 4: USE INDEXES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES**

**SUMMARY:** Use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print or computer-based formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk if you need help figuring out which index and format will be best. You can find periodical articles by the article author, title, or keyword by using the periodical indexes in the Library home page. If the full text is not linked in the index you are using, write down the citation from the index and search for the title of the periodical in the Cornell Library Classic Catalog. The catalog lists the print, microform, and electronic versions of periodicals at Cornell.

### **STEP 5: FIND ADDITIONAL INTERNET RESOURCES**

Nearly everyone is aware of and uses Google and its branches, Google Scholar, Google Books, Google News, YouTube, etc., to search and find information on the open Internet (as opposed to the subscription-only resources you will encounter in steps 2 through 4 above). Here are links to other search engines.

## **STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND**

**SUMMARY:** See How to Critically Analyze Information Sources and Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-Scholarly Periodicals: A Checklist of Criteria for suggestions on evaluating the authority and quality of the books and articles you located.

**Watch on YouTube:** Identifying scholarly journals Identifying substantive news sources

## **STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT**

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources.

Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references.