

## RESEARCH WORKSHEETS

### 1. Select a General Topic.

Research for an assigned paper or other presentation takes a lot of time and effort, so enjoy the process by researching something that holds your interest. Even if your topic is pre-assigned and seems not very interesting at first, try to think of an aspect of the topic that will make the process rewarding for you. If stuck, talk to your instructor to see if you can design your own topic.

GENERAL TOPIC IS: \_\_\_\_\_

WRITE DOWN ANYTHING YOU ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE TOPIC; TRY TO THINK OF AT LEAST THREE THINGS:

WRITE DOWN ANY PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE ABOUT THE TOPIC; TRY TO THINK OF AT LEAST THREE QUESTIONS:

## 2. Develop Search Vocabulary

To dramatically increase the relevancy and usefulness of the information you find, you should conduct multiple searches using different search language. To this end, it is helpful to create a list of possible search terms. As you research, add to your list any words or phrases you commonly see. You might also use a thesaurus (try *thesaurus.com*) to find synonyms. Mark each word or phrase on your list as a synonym for your topic, or as a broader topic, a narrower topic, or a related topic.

Please note: when searching, avoid using connective words (like *and, but, or*), articles (like *a, an, the*), and other very common words; try to use only nouns and verbs.

LIST POSSIBLE KEYWORDS AND PHRASES FOR YOUR TOPIC:

CREATE SEARCH STRINGS:

Main terms go across. Synonyms or related terms for each go down.

|           |            |           |            |           |
|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
|           | <b>AND</b> |           | <b>AND</b> |           |
| <b>OR</b> |            | <b>OR</b> |            | <b>OR</b> |
|           | <b>AND</b> |           | <b>AND</b> |           |
| <b>OR</b> |            | <b>OR</b> |            | <b>OR</b> |
|           | <b>AND</b> |           | <b>AND</b> |           |

*Example: to find information about working as librarian at a college*

|               |            |            |            |                  |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| librarianship | <b>AND</b> | career     | <b>AND</b> | college          |
| <b>OR</b>     |            | <b>OR</b>  |            | <b>OR</b>        |
| libraries     | <b>AND</b> | jobs       | <b>AND</b> | university       |
| <b>OR</b>     |            | <b>OR</b>  |            | <b>OR</b>        |
| librarians    | <b>AND</b> | profession | <b>AND</b> | higher education |

### 3. Find Background Information

Read background material to get an overview of your topic. Overviews often introduce us to historical contexts as well as current controversies surrounding a particular subject. You may find information that will help broaden or narrow your topic, as well as more potential search terms. You might find answers to preliminary questions (from Step 1) that you had about the topic.

The Library's Reference collection is a great place to start. You will find information from encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, etc., some of which are general in nature, and some of which are very specialized. For assistance, stop by the reference desk, email [refdesk@aacc.edu](mailto:refdesk@aacc.edu), or call 410-777-2456.

You can access many online reference books by going to the Library's main page ([www.aacc.edu/library](http://www.aacc.edu/library)) and choosing "Library Databases." Look under "General Reference" to find *Credo Reference*, *Greenwood Digital Collection*, and *Gale Reference Library*, all of which contain encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other reference books.

LIST THE RESOURCES YOU SEARCHED FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 
- 
- 
- 

DID BACKGROUND INFORMATION ANSWER ALL INITIAL QUESTIONS (FROM STEP 1)?

Yes  No (If No, unanswered questions may be useful in Step 5.)

### 4. Narrow or Broaden the Topic

If you find far too much background information on your topic, consider picking a sub-topic. Perhaps use vocabulary (from Step 2) that you labeled "narrower topic."

NARROWED TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

If you find far too little background information on your topic, consider choosing a broader topic. Perhaps use vocabulary (from Step 2) that you labeled "broader topic."

BROADENED TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Focus Your Research

Now that you have a general sense of your topic, you want to develop several Research Questions. The answers to these Research Questions should have the potential to impact what you think about the topic, so avoid questions that will lead only to information that supports your current thinking. If any of your initial questions (from Step 1) were not answered using background information, you may be able to develop them into Research Questions.

POSSIBLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Note: consider where you might find information to answer your research questions (articles, books, audio/visual materials, government publications, websites, etc.).

Example: What have literary critics said about the role of the Ghost in *Hamlet*? What were the prevailing beliefs in Elizabethan times about ghosts? Did Shakespeare use ghosts in other plays, and, if so, how? (books, articles)

Example: Do we know what causes autism? How many different kinds of autism are there, and how are they different? What are current treatments for people with autism? (books, articles)

Example: How has Proctor & Gamble used animals to test their products? Does Proctor & Gamble publish its corporate position on animal testing? How has Proctor & Gamble responded to boycotts for testing products on animals? (articles, websites)

## 6. Find Current and Specific Information: Library Databases

For online access to reference books and articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals, go to the Library's main page ([www.aacc.edu/library](http://www.aacc.edu/library)), and choose "Library Databases." From off-campus, enter the barcode number from the back of your Truxal Library card. Read these materials online, print them, and/or e-mail them.

*Please note: these are **NOT** considered "internet" or "web" sources, although we access them through the internet.*

BE SURE TO GATHER THE INFORMATION THAT YOU WILL NEED TO CREATE CITATIONS FOR THESE SOURCES:

### For Books

Full name(s) of author(s) or editor(s):

Full title of the book:

Facts of publication (city, publisher, date):

If there is more than one edition of the book, edition number:

If applicable, name of series, volume number, and total volumes in the series:

Page number(s), if available online, for information read or noted:

Name of the database where you found the book (or excerpt):

Date you accessed the book:

Url address (starts with http://):

### For Journal, Magazine, And Newspaper Articles

Full name(s) of author(s):

Full title of the article:

Full title of the journal, magazine, or newspaper:

Facts of publication (publication date and, if applicable, volume and issue numbers):

Starting and ending page number(s), if available online, for the article:

Page number(s) for information noted:

Name of the database where you found the article:

Date you accessed the article:

Url address (starts with http://) :

## Find Detailed and Historical Information: Library Catalog

To find information about books, periodicals, and audio/visual materials housed in Truxal Library, go to the Library's main page ([www.aacc.edu/library](http://www.aacc.edu/library)), and choose "Library Catalog." If you find something that you would like to read but you are not able to come to the Library, contact the Information Resources Librarian to arrange for delivery (e-mail: [DLLibrarian@aacc.edu](mailto:DLLibrarian@aacc.edu); phone: 410-777-2216) You may also use the resources of your local public library or community college library.

*Please note: Truxal Library books on popular topics get checked out early and can be checked out for four weeks, so start your research as soon as possible.*

BE SURE TO GATHER THE INFORMATION THAT YOU WILL NEED TO CREATE CITATIONS FOR THESE SOURCES:

### For Books

Full name(s) of author(s) or editor(s):

Full title of the book:

Facts of publication (city, publisher, date):

If there is more than one edition of the book, edition number:

If applicable, name of series, volume number, and total volumes in the series:

Page number(s) for information read or noted:

### For Journal, Magazine, And Newspaper Articles

Full name(s) of author(s):

Full title of the article:

Full title of the journal, magazine, or newspaper:

Facts of publication (publication date and, if applicable, volume and issue numbers):

Starting and ending page number(s) for the article:

Page number(s) for information noted:

### For Audio/Visual Materials

Consult a style manual like *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, or *Chicago Manual of Style*.

## 7. Find Current and Specific Information: The Internet

Many websites contain reliable information, but anyone can publish a website, so be especially cautious and critical when using Internet information.

USE THIS CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING WEBSITES:

**Currency**

Is there a copyright date? When was the site last updated?

**Authority**

Who is authoring the information? Is it clear who sponsors the site and what the sponsor's purpose is? Is this a recognized organization or individual? Is there information on how to contact them? Is there a list of references?

**Accuracy**

Does the information appear to be accurate (spelling, format, etc.)? Are the webpages easy to navigate, structurally sound, and usable? Can you verify the information elsewhere? Do others in the field review the content of the site?

**Objectivity**

What goals do the pages meet? What biases are reflected in the site? Is the information intended to persuade the audience? Does this site link only to similar points-of-view?

**Coverage**

Is the Web site still under construction? Does the site provide a comprehensive range of thought and theory on the subject?

**Final Questions:**

Is the site relevant to my topic? Is this the best information I can find on my topic? Does this site complement material I have already gathered?

BE SURE TO GATHER THE INFORMATION THAT YOU WILL NEED TO CREATE CITATIONS FOR THESE SOURCES:

For Websites

Full name(s) of author(s), editor(s), and/or sponsor(s) of the website:

Title of the website:

Date the website was last updated or original date of electronic publication:

Date you accessed the website:

Url address (starts with http://):

Full information about any previous or simultaneous publication in print form:

## 8. Cite Sources

There are many standard methods—or *styles*—for composing citations. The style determines the order of the information in the citation, as well as punctuation and other formatting. Citation style is often related to your field of study, but you should always verify with your instructor which style to use. To find more information about styles, visit the Library's Plagiarism webpage and choose "Citing Sources" (<http://www.aacc.edu/library/Citation.cfm>).

MLA STYLE is used for citations for literature, arts, and humanities. Consult the Library's pamphlet, "How to Cite Sources: MLA Style," or ask at the reference desk for the authoritative text:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2003.

APA STYLE is most often used for citations for psychology, education, and other social sciences. Consult the Library's pamphlet, "How to Cite Sources: APA Style," or ask at the reference desk for the authoritative text:

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

CHICAGO STYLE: citations for non-scholarly publications, like general interest books, magazines, and newspapers. Ask at the reference desk for the authoritative text:

University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

*Note: other standard citation styles include Turabian, American Medical Association, and Scientific Style and Format.*

**If you have questions or need assistance, call the reference desk at 410-777-2456 or send e-mail to [refdesk@aacc.edu](mailto:refdesk@aacc.edu). You may also contact the Information Resources Librarian at 410-777-2216 or e-mail [DLLibrarian@aacc.edu](mailto:DLLibrarian@aacc.edu)**