

Research Basics

1. Find a topic that interests you.

- ▶ Check assignment details from your professor.
- ▶ Ask a librarian for topic ideas related to your interests.
- ▶ Go to the research topic idea generator @ <http://www.lib.odu.edu/libassist/idea/index.php>

TOPIC IDEA EXAMPLE:

You are shocked by a Houston Chronicle article on drunk driving:

“Harris County had the highest rate of alcohol-related traffic fatalities... of the 10 most populated counties in the country last year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.”
Houston Chronicle, November 29, 2006 p. 4

2. Select a realistic aspect of the topic to cover.

- ▶ Target a time period or geographical area.
- ▶ Explore a viewpoint or group affected.
- ▶ Consider a specific problem, issue, or trend.

FOCUSING TOPIC EXAMPLES:



3. Pick important topic word(s) or phrase(s) to use with search tools.

- ▶ Start searching with 1 - 3 words or phrases.
- ▶ Use “quotes” to find specific phrases (see example below).
- ▶ Increase the number of search words or phrases to limit results.
- ▶ Decrease the number of search words or phrases to expand results.
- ▶ Check spelling if no results found.

SEARCH EXAMPLE:

“drunk driving” and teenagers

4. Choose the kind of information needed to support the topic.

INFORMATION TYPE EXAMPLES:

Overviews

Encyclopedia about alcohol abuse & teens

Research Studies

Journal article on risk-taking behavior of teens

Personal Accounts

Interviews of alcohol counselors working with teens

Statistics

Government study about the numbers of teen drinkers in car accidents

News Reports

Newspaper story on teens who drink alcohol and street race

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5. Identify important search tools to find reliable information.

SEARCH RESULT EXAMPLES: Search “drunk driving and teenagers” in:

Library Databases such as ProQuest @ <http://cyfair.lonestar.edu/29178/>

Find research by experts and legal issues in the news:

- ▶ Acceptance of and Engagement in Risky Driving Behaviors by Teenagers (journal article)
- ▶ Many Under 21 Drive Under the Influence (newspaper story)

Library Catalog @ <http://library.lonestar.edu/hip/cyf.htm>

Find real world examples, interviews, and facts:

- ▶ Safe Road Home: Stop Your Teen from Drinking & Driving (includes book and DVD)
- ▶ Party at Gregg’s (CBS News DVD on parents allowing alcohol at teen parties)

Government Search Engine @ <http://www.google.com/ig/usgov>

Find statistics and government studies:

- ▶ Impaired Driving Facts from <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- ▶ Public Opinion and Underage Drinking from <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

6. Find and evaluate information.

- ▶ Select items that use reliable sources that support your topic viewpoint.
- ▶ Check if authors provide sources for information they list in books, web sites, etc.
- ▶ Check several sources to see if they give a new and unique perspective on the topic.
- ▶ Use a mix of sources that include statistics and research to provide substantial support.
- ▶ Save time by asking librarians for help if you cannot find what you need.
- ▶ Request materials from other libraries at the reference desk or via the library catalog.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE:

The “Teenage Drunk Driving” web page at <http://www.firsteagle.com/tdd.htm> (an insurance company) includes statistics, but in most cases, doesn’t cite the source of the data. To be credible, statistics cited should list a reputable source.

Selected information in previous section adapted from <http://www.factchecked.org/ToolsOfTheTrade.aspx>.

7. Cite sources correctly.

- ▶ Keep a list of sources as you gather information.
- ▶ Ask your professor what citation style he/she prefers.
- ▶ Use the citation guides @ <http://cyfair.lonestar.edu/29194/>.

CITATION EXAMPLE:

“Party at Gregg’s.” Narr. Lesley Stahl. *Sixty Minutes*. 21 Aug. 2005. DVD. CBS. 2006.

