Research Basics

Ben Bernanke, American economist and former chairman of the Federal Reserve, said, “Research itself provides an important long-run perspective on the issues that we face on a day-to-day basis” (Lloyd). Zora Neale Hurston, American author, folklorist, and anthropologist stated that “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose” (Lloyd). Neil Armstrong, American astronaut and first person to walk on the moon, claimed that “Research is creating new knowledge” (Lloyd).

Research may seem daunting, but it’s actually one of the most exciting things you’ll do in your college career. It can lead to new discoveries, and it can solidify your interest in your chosen field. In this handout, we’ll include helpful information about starting your research projects.

Using Appropriate Sources for Finding Supporting Evidence

Let’s talk briefly about using appropriate sources for finding supporting evidence. Now that you’re a college student, this is more important than ever. Students often want to use sources like Wikipedia and Spark Notes to get information. Although these sources contain a great deal of information that can serve as a jumping off point for your support, neither one of them are scholarly enough to be appropriate for college-level writing. Instead, use more authoritative sources like

- reliable magazines (like Time, Newsweek, or Consumer Reports)
- noted authorities on your topic

Learning about Peer Reviewed Journals Related to Your Topic

Ask your professor if there are any journals that you should consult. If the paper you’re writing is for your major, you need to learn about these journals so you’ll be knowledgeable about scholarship in your chosen field. Learning about these journals will help you not only with this assignment, but they’ll also help you as you move forward into the job market. People who know about publications in their field have industry awareness, marketplace knowledge, and understanding of their competition, three things that will give them a distinct advantage when they start applying to graduate programs or interviewing for jobs.

Most of the time, your professor will ask you to use journals that have been peer reviewed. Professional scholars value peer reviewed journals because experts in the field read and critique each article that is submitted for publication. Therefore, articles that you find in peer reviewed journals are authoritative and well researched. Using peer reviewed articles adds credibility to your own work.

Remember to ask your professor what format you should follow for this paper. If this paper is for a class in your major, you need to become familiar with the format people in your field use. Some professors deduct points if you don’t follow the appropriate format.
Consulting with a Reference Librarian
If you’re not sure where to start, go to your campus library and ask to speak to one of the reference librarians. Reference librarians are one of the greatest untapped resources on college campuses—they specialize in locating information. They won’t do your research for you, but they can point you in the right direction. Many college libraries offer “reference by appointment,” where you schedule an appointment to meet privately with a reference librarian, free of charge. Take advantage of this service—it can change the course of your college career in terms of the invaluable information you’ll receive.

Citing Your Sources
Of course, you’ll need to properly cite the sources for your quotes. The way you do it is dependent on the style guide you’re supposed to use for this assignment. Make sure you’ve asked your professor which style guide is appropriate for your paper.

Another thing to keep in mind—when in doubt, cite your source. Many professors use websites like TurnItIn.com, which make it easy to spot plagiarism. If the words you put in your paper aren’t your own, cite your source, even if you’ve tried to paraphrase instead of including lots of quotes. In this handout, we use MLA format.

Using Academic Search Complete to Start Your Research
Academic Search Complete is an online indexing database that includes thousands of peer reviewed journals and full text periodicals. It’s the ideal place to start your research project.

To begin, go to the UNT Library’s home page:  
http://www.library.unt.edu/

Enter “Academic Search Complete” in the search engine
Look for the section marked “Books and More.”

Click on the “Get it online” button. This will take you to the Library’s log in page:

Log in using your EUID and password. This will take you to Academic Search Complete’s homepage:
Type in your topic. For purposes of this handout, we’ll use the topic “Should Confederate statues be taken down.”

Click on “Search.”

The search engine will tell you “no results were found.” Unlike Google, search engines like Academic Search Complete tend not to “like” super specific search phrases like the one we used. However, Academic Search Complete will yield much better, more authoritative, and more scholarly results more quickly than Google will.

Now, let’s take some of our search terms out and just type in “Confederate” and “statues.”

We got 49 results.
Using Boolean Operators to Aid Your Search

Using a term like “AND” is called a Boolean operator. Search engines like Academic Search Complete work with Boolean operators better than they do with complete sentences and phrases. You can also use the terms “OR” and “NOT” to limit what the search engine will find for you.

As you search for information, consider using alternate terms. For our Confederate statues project, we might type in “racism,” “civil rights,” or “slavery,” for instance. Think about single terms that might yield even more results on your topic. Remember that the more broad your search term is, the more information the search engine will find for you.

Now let’s refine our search to get even better information for our research project.

Refining Your Search to Get More Scholarly Results and Full Text Links

We can refine our search further by selecting “Full Text” and “Scholarly.”
Now our search has been narrowed down to 11 articles. You’ve decided to take a closer look at an article entitled “Confederate Memory and Monuments: Of Judicial Opinions, Statues and Buildings.”

Notice the text that reads “PDF Full Text.” This means that you can download a complete copy of this article. Now click on the title “Confederate Memory and Monuments: Of Judicial Opinions, Statues and Buildings.” Now the page looks like this:

You can go ahead and click on the PDF version to read this article. The toolbar on the right gives you some other handy options.

- Add to folder lets you do just that.
- You can print this article.
- You can email it to yourself.
- “Cite” will let you choose how the article is cited. You can then copy and paste the citation right into your paper. Cool beans!

Some articles are recorded so that you can listen to them being read to you. You can even choose the type of voice you want it read in. 😊
If the article you’re interested in isn’t available as a PDF, you may request to have the article delivered to you through ILLiad, the library’s interlibrary loan option. You can read more about ILLiad here: http://www.library.unt.edu/access-services/about-illiad

Good luck with your research!

Works Cited