

The Seven Steps of the Research Process

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the sequence of steps that writers go through during the research process. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Seven Steps of the Research Process

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 or web resources, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps.

1a. Identify and Develop Your Topic

When you're starting a research project, it can be helpful to state your topic as a question.

➔ **EXAMPLE** If you are interested in finding out about the use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does the use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?"

Once you've phrased your topic as a question to be answered, you can identify the main concepts or keywords in that question.

1b. Find Background Information

Before getting too deep into research, it's important to ensure you have solid background information on your topic.

A great way of finding background information is looking up your keywords in the indexes of subject encyclopedias. Then, you can read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research.

You can also note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles and look into those sources for further research.

1c. Use Catalogs to Find Books and Media

If you go to a public or academic library to do your research, use guided keyword searching to find materials by topic or subject in the library catalogue. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the location

information (call number).

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 because they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area.

1d. Use Indexes to Find Periodical Articles

Next, you can use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print, in computer-based formats, or in 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 using the periodical indexes in the library's catalogue.

1e. Find Internet Resources

Using a search engine, such as Google, is often an efficient way to find web-based sources on your topic.

If you are searching for material that includes key phrases, a good strategy is to use quotation marks around these phrases in the search box. This ensures that you will only be shown results in which the words in those phrases appear together.

1f. Evaluate What You Find

You now need to evaluate the authority and quality of the books and articles you located.

If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. When you're ready to write, keep an annotated list of books to help you organize, format, and draft your paper.

1g. Cite What You Find Using a Standard Format

In order to give credit where credit is due, you must 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.
- It allows readers to duplicate your research and locate the sources.

Representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism, which we will discuss later in this course.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that research is a process much like writing itself. The **seven steps of the research process** are **identifying and developing your topic**, **finding background information**, **using catalogues to find books and media**, **using indexes to find periodical articles**, **finding internet resources**, **evaluating what you find**, and **citing what you find using a standard format**. Depending on your topic and the amount of research experience you have, you may need to repeat or adjust some of these steps.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "The Seven Steps of the Research Process" tutorial.