



# Academic Research Survival Kit

## OVERVIEW

Doing academic research doesn't have to be hard or scary. With a few tips and some help you too can be a master of research!

Whether your writing a paper, giving a presentation, or researching a topic, this Survival Kit is designed to help with your research process from beginning to end.

Remember, if your having trouble with your research come to the library and we are more than happy to help.

Good luck on your assignment!

## STEPS TO RESEARCH

1. **Choose a Topic:** Understand your assignment. Brainstorm a good topic. Narrow or broaden your topic.
2. **Use the Best Resources:** Find out what types of information sources are available to you as a Trinity community member.
3. **Find sources:** Pick out good *keywords* and search for books, articles, and more.
4. **Evaluate your sources:** ask the right question when evaluating and deciding if a source should be used in academic level research .
5. **Cite your sources:** know when and why to cite your sources.

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## LEARN HOW

- To brainstorm a topic
- To find the best resources
- Pick the best resources for your topic
- To avoid plagiarism



## CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC

In this article and the next you will learn how to choose a topic that fits your assignment, get some tips for brainstorming your topic, and how to narrow or broaden your topic.

When you have an assignment what do you need to know?

**PURPOSE**—Do you need to...

- ◆ Compare or contrast ideas?
- ◆ Persuade someone of your views?
- ◆ Inform the audience about your topic?

**REQUIREMENTS**—Do you need...

- ◆ A minimum number of sources?
- ◆ Peer reviewed articles?
- ◆ A certain citation format? (APA? MLA?)
- ◆ A certain number of pages or words?

Most times you can find the requirements of the assignment described in your syllabus or in the Moodle assignment. If you need more clarification be sure to ask your professor. There's nothing worse than going back to start because you did too much, too little, or the wrong research.

*“Think of topics for which you have a personal interest, knowledge, or life experience.”*

### HOT TOPICS, ISSUES, AND CONTROVERSIES

- ◆ Gender equality
- ◆ Gay rights
- ◆ Housing & Development
- ◆ Legalization of Cannabis
- ◆ #BlackLivesMatter
- ◆ Political Election
- ◆ Transgender rights
- ◆ Synthetic Drugs
- ◆ Gentrification
- ◆ Higher Education
- ◆ Immigration
- ◆ Civil Rights
- ◆ Technology
- ◆ State of Education in US
- ◆ College Athletes
- ◆ Juvenile justice
- ◆ War & Conflict
- ◆ Global Warming or Climate change

## CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC : BRAINSTORMING

### Brainstorm!!

Think of topics that interest you...

Think of topics for which you have:

- A personal interest, knowledge, or life experience
- An option about
- A desire to learn more

If no Topic is interesting...

- Take 5 minutes and write down any ideas related to the assignment that come to mind, then look at what you wrote for an idea or pattern that stands out.
- Review your course textbook or notes for something that piques your interest.

If you're still having problems try using the Trinity Library Research Guides on your subject, use the CQ Researcher database to Browse Topics, or check out the Hot Topics and Issues in the left side column.

### Do You Need to Narrow or Broaden Your Topic?

**Narrow:** Often students initially pick a topic that is too broad. This can bring back too many results when searching for sources. If your topic is too broad try asking “what”, “when”, “where”, or “why”. For example: the topic “obesity” could become “What are some of the causes of Obesity” the topic “College completion” could become “Why don't some college students graduate?”

**Broaden:** If your topic is too narrow you will have a hard time finding *enough* sources and the right kind of information you need (statistics, journal articles, etc). How do you broaden your topic? Think in more general terms. For example: “Causes of Teenage Homelessness in Washington, DC” could become “Causes of Teenage Homelessness in Cities”



*Books are where you get comprehensive information. You can also look at the authors references for more sources*

## USE THE BEST RESOURCES

In this article you will learn about the different *types of sources* available to you as a Trinity community member, as well as *deciding* which types of sources you need for *your research*.

Trinity Library has many different kinds of resources available, including books and journal articles.

### Types of sources :

**Reference Article:** encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs. This is where you go to get basic , background information. Depending on you assignment and topic, you may not always need to use this source. These types of sources help you get a basic understand when your researching a topic you don't know a lot about.

**Newspaper & Magazine article:** usually written by journalists, newspapers and magazines are good for recent events, local events, pop culture, reviews, and editorials.

**Journal Article:** journal articles are written by experts in a field, for other experts in the field, and are usually research based, we call these scholarly articles. Journal articles are where you go for the *latest research* on a topic. Many journal articles (not all) are peer reviewed.

**Book:** there are two types of books, fiction (stories) and non fiction (real). Almost always when researching at an Academic level you will use non fiction books. Books are where you get *comprehensive* information on a topic. It takes time to research, get published, and get in a library, so don't expect the most up to date information in books.

**Website:** websites or webpages are different that the above resources. *Anyone* can create a webpage. Government (.gov) websites are great to find statistical information. **Use caution when using websites for doing academic research. The majority of your research should not be website based.**

## POPULAR VS. SCHOLARLY

### POPULAR ARTICLES:

Are often written by journalists or professional writers for a general audience

Use language easily understood by general readers

Rarely give full citations for sources

Written for the general public

### SCHOLARLY ARTICLES:

Are written by and for faculty, researchers or scholars (chemists, historians, doctors, artists, etc.)

Uses scholarly or technical language

Tend to be longer articles about research

Include full citations for sources

Are often peer reviewed (articles are reviewed by an editor and other specialists before being accepted for publication)

BOOK REVIEWS AND EDITORIALS ARE NOT CONSIDERED SCHOLARLY ARTICLES, EVEN WHEN FOUND IN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS\*

## CAN I USE WIKIPEDIA?

### How does Wikipedia work?

"Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based, free-content encyclopedia project based on an openly editable model." - Wikipedia

### Why is Wikipedia helpful?

A great time to use Wikipedia is at the beginning of your research. Use Wikipedia to get some background information on your topic and to help narrow down your topic. You can also use the References (at the bottom of the Wikipedia page) to find other resources, sometimes journal articles, to start finding resources.

### Why is Wikipedia bad?

Anyone can enter information on Wikipedia, we do not know who the authors are and therefore Wikipedia articles cannot be considered scholarly. Sometimes articles are vandalized, whether for fun, as a hoax, or because the subject is controversial.

### DO...

- use Wikipedia to become familiar with a topic or as a starting point for research
- use Wikipedia to find more search terms or keywords for your research topic
- maintain a level of skepticism when reading Wikipedia articles

### DON'T...

- cite Wikipedia articles in your bibliography for assignments or papers
- treat information on Wikipedia as facts, especially when concerning legal or medical advice

## FIND SOURCES: KEYWORDS

In this article you will learn what keywords are and why they are useful. How to identify keywords and brainstorm synonyms. And how to use keywords to formulate an effective search.

**KEYWORDS:** are simple phrases or words that describe your topic. You enter your keywords into a database or search engine to find sources. A keyword search is generally the broadest



*Use words found in your textbooks to think of keywords on a topic.*

## KEYWORDS, SYNONYMS & SEARCH STRATEGY

Step 1: Identify the most important term in your topic or research question. These are often nouns

Step 2: Identify Synonyms, some people use different words to describe the same concept. So it's important to identify any possible synonyms or similar concepts to your keywords.

Step 3: Forming a search strategy, now that you have your keywords and synonyms it's time to put them together to form search strategies. To do this you will take your keywords or synonyms and string them together usually using "AND".

Example:

Laws AND domestic violence AND restraining order

## FIND REFERENCE SOURCES

In this article you will find out what reference sources are and how to use them to find background information on your topic.

Reference sources include:

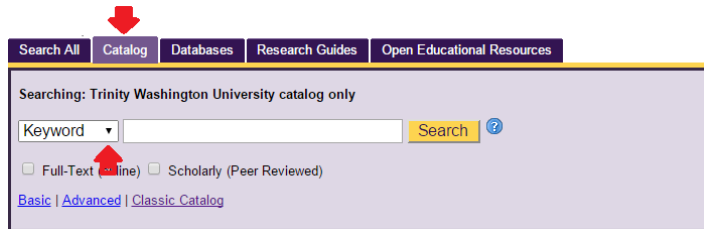
Encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, manuals, atlases . Some sources like Encyclopedia Britannica (a Trinity database) cover lots of topics. Other's focus on one subject like EBSCO's Nursing reference Center.

When should I use Reference sources? - When looking for background information on a topic . When trying to find information on key ideas, theories , historic dates, and to define terms and concepts

Why should I use reference resources?- To help find the key players and important events. To understand your topic first, so you can explain it clearly in your assignment. To help narrow your topic by exploring all areas.

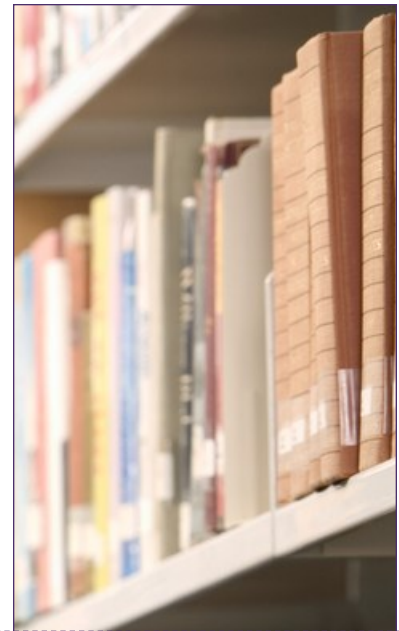
## FINDING BOOKS

In this article you will learn how to search in the Trinity Catalog and WRLC catalog for books and DVDs. You can search for books and DVDs in the Trinity catalog from the Trinity Library website's home page <http://www.trinitydc.edu/library/>. The search type



or title search. Enter your terms into the search box and click search.

will default to a Keyword search. Click the down arrow to change to an author



*Once in the articles detailed record you can Cite, E-mail, or print the article.*

## FINDING ARTICLES

In this article you will find out how to search for magazine, newspaper, and journal articles.

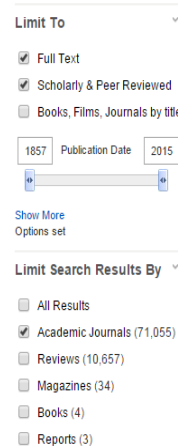
There are many options to search for articles from the library's homepage.

- (1) Do a keyword search by adding keywords into the search bar
- (2) Click the Databases tab to search subject specific databases
- (3) Use the Research guides for advice on which specialized databases to use offered at Trinity Library

Once you have your search results be sure

to use the limiters on the left hand menu to get Full Text, Academic Journals, and the correct dates. Your limiters may change depending on the requirements and topic of your assignment.

In the articles detailed record you may email, cite, or print the article.



### Tools

Add to folder

Print

E-mail

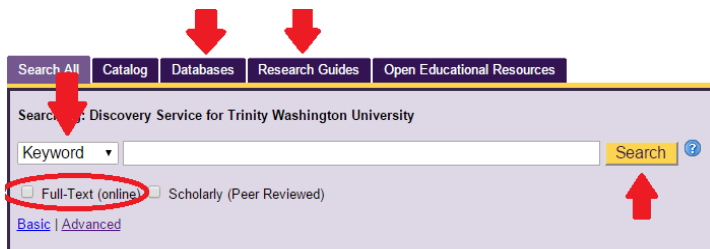
Save

Cite

## DATABASES @ TRINITY LIBRARY

- ◆ ABI/INFORM Complete
- ◆ Academic Search Premier
- ◆ Business Source Premier
- ◆ CINAHL with Full Text
- ◆ Education Research Complete
- ◆ Encyclopedia Britannica Online
- ◆ Gender Watch
- ◆ JSTOR
- ◆ LexisNexis Academic
- ◆ Pharmaceutical News Index
- ◆ PsychINFO
- ◆ PQ Biology Journals
- ◆ PQ Criminal Justice
- ◆ PQ Education Journals
- ◆ PQ Family Health
- ◆ PQ Nursing and Allied Health
- ◆ PQ Political Science

AND MUCH MORE!





## USING WRLC

Trinity Library is a member of the Washington Regional Library Consortium (WRLC). The WRLC includes all of the university libraries in Washington, DC plus some in Virginia. As a member of the Trinity community you have access to the books of these libraries. You can request books from the Trinity Library website to be sent to Trinity Library for you to pick

up. It's all a perk of registering your Trinity ID at the library. Searching the WRLC catalog almost just like searching the Trinity catalog. To access the catalog, click the WRLC menu on the left hand side of the library website. Once you find a book you like, in the record, click the red request button. Your book will arrive within 5 days for you to pick up at Trinity Library.



*“As a member of Trinity Washington University you have access to almost all of the libraries belonging to universities in Washington, DC!”*

## DO I HAVE TO EVALUATE MY RESOURCES!?

Evaluating your resources is an important part of the research process. The quality of the assignment you complete will depend on the quality of the information you use, so you want to make sure you are using high quality resources.

Only YOU can decide if the source is appropriate for your assignment.

## EVALUATING SOURCES

There are four criteria to use when evaluating your resources. Ask yourself the following questions while evaluating the following criteria.

### **AUTHORITY-**

Who is the author of this work?

What are their credentials, and do they have experience in this field?

If it's a website, are you able to find the about section? Or contact information?

### **ACCURACY-**

For scholarly materials, are there in-text citations and a bibliography?

For magazines and websites, what is the purpose? - do they want to inform, or just sell something?

### **OBJECTIVITY-**

Is it subjective or is there a clear bias present?

### **TIMELINESS-**

When was this published?

Is there more recent information I should be considering?



## CITING YOUR SOURCES

In this article you will learn why citing your sources is important and when to cite your sources

### WHY CITE YOUR SOURCES?

- (1) *You acknowledge others' work*—When you acknowledge an author's work, you are giving them credit for their own original ideas and effort. You should always give credit to an author for their work.
- (2) *You have more credibility*—Citation shows that you have researched your topic and you know what you are talking about. It also shows that you consulted credible sources during the research process.
- (3) *You avoid plagiarism*—Plagiarism includes not citing your sources, or not citing them properly. Learning how and when to properly cite your sources will help you avoid plagiarism.
- (4) *Your sources are easier to find*—The readers of your paper or audience of your speech can more easily find the sources you used. (Your Professor will be happy too!)

## CITATION GUIDES & RESOURCES

Use these resources to help with citation :

### **Purdue OWL Online Writing Lab:**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

### **American Psychology Association. APA Style Guide:**

[apastyleguide.org](http://apastyleguide.org)

### **Citing government sources:**

<http://libguides.wlu.edu/c.php?g=158245&p=1036291>

### **University of Wisconsin's "The Writers Handbook"**

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPA.html>

### Trinity's Writing Center:

<http://www.trinitydc.edu/writing/>

Located in the Academic Services Center on the Library's 1st Floor (103)

## TRINITY LIBRARY

### REGULAR SEMESTER- HOURS

Monday– Friday

8:30a–10p

Saturday

8:30a–5:30p

Sunday

1p-9p

Phone: 202-884-9350

Email:

trinitylibrary@trinitydc.edu

Web: trinitydc.edu/library

## REFERENCES

The Trinity Library Research Survival Kit was adapted from a Libguide created by the College of Southern Nevada Library. The original content may be found at <http://libguides.csn.edu/research-101>.

Popular Vs. Scholarly section was adapted from University of Arizona’s “Find Materials” Libguide found at <http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/scholarly/guide.html>

Parts of “Can I use Wikipedia” were adapted from Wikipedia LibGuide, by the University of Pittsburgh. Found at <http://pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=12347&p=65699>

Plagiarism cartoon found at <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/solveproblem/strat-cheating/plagiarism.html>

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Academic Semester Hours  
M-F 8:30 AM-10 PM  
SAT 8:30 AM-5:30 PM  
SUN 1 PM-9 PM



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