

Guide to Library Research



I. Working with Your Topic

A. Selecting a Topic

Think about:

Is it interesting to you?

Is there a manageable amount of information?

Topic Focus	Example
Too broad = Too much information	No Child Left Behind Act
Too narrow = Not enough information	the effects of No Child Left Behind on 3rd grade reading scores in Edith Bowen School in 2003
Just right = Manageable amount of information	the impact of high-stakes testing on reading achievement in the United States

B. Develop a research plan by asking the following questions:

1. What do I already know about this topic?

Example: In my high school, teachers taught to the high-stakes tests rather than what they thought we should know.

2. What do I need to know to understand this topic better? **Ask specific questions!**

Examples:

- a. What is the history of high-stakes testing? Why and how did they get started?
- b. Is there any research showing that teachers do "teach to the test?"
- c. What impact does "teaching to the test" have on effective teaching practices? Or student learning?

3. Where will I find the answers to these questions? See the "Selecting the Right Kind of Information Source" section of this Guide. And be sure to ask a librarian!

C. Find background information if the topic is new to you.

- Reference books, such as specialized encyclopedias, are available on the first floor of the library. Ask a librarian at the Reference Desk for help selecting one.

Examples: Encyclopedia of Education; Encyclopedia of Education Research

- CQ Researcher, a weekly publication that covers current issues in depth. Available electronically via the library website at: <http://library.usu.edu/Retool/Inabs/more.php?Identify=55>

D. Brainstorm!

List words that describe the concepts in your research questions. Try to think of synonyms, or different words that describe the same thing. Also try to think of different aspects or parts of your topic.

Synonyms for the Main Idea	Aspects/Parts of Your Topic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• high-stakes testing• standardized testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sub-concept: "teaching to the test"• Age: elementary versus high school• Geographic: the U.S. versus Europe or Japan

Keyword/Concept Brainstorming:

II. Select the Right Kind of Information Source

Different kinds of information sources are useful depending on your topic and your specific research questions.

Books

- Good for general background or in-depth coverage of a topic.
- Often, they're not as current as articles.
- To find books in the library, use the Library Online Catalog.
- For more information on how to search for books on your topic, see the How to Find a Book section of this guide.

Articles

Scholarly Journal Articles

- Good for focused treatments of a topic. Generally, high-quality information based on research and reviewed by experts in the field.
- To find scholarly journal articles, you will need to search an article database. These will provide citations (author, title, name of journal, date, and often a summary of the article) and, sometimes the full-text of the article. To see the list of library databases, click the "Article Searching and Databases" link on the library web page.

Newspaper and Popular Magazine Articles

- Good for current treatment of a topic. These are also good resources for editorials and opinions. These articles are not reviewed by experts.
- To find newspaper or magazine articles, click the "Article Searching and Databases" link on the library home page and choose Newspaper Databases.

For more information on how to search for articles, see the "How to Find Articles" section of this guide.

Web Sites

- Web sites can be good for very specific information about people, companies, products, etc.
- Keep in mind that you have to take the responsibility to evaluate web sites for quality

III. Developing a Search Strategy

A. Basic Search Strategies

No matter what kind of information source you are looking for (books, articles, web pages), you need to tell the computer how to look for the information you need.

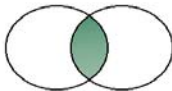
Use the **terms or keywords** that describe your topic. For more on keywords, see the "Working with Your Topic" section of this guide.

Search ideas:

You can search for groups of keywords by connecting words using *and*, *or*, and *not*, or search for phrases by putting keywords in quotations (example: "high-stakes testing"). To find out how to search for a phrase in a particular database, look for a link to Help.

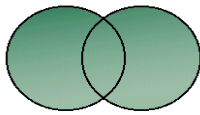
Summary of Basic Search Operators

testing AND policy



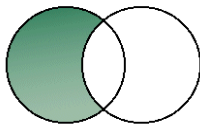
Finds only those records which contain both words anywhere in the record.

"high-stakes testing" OR "standardized testing"



Finds any records that contain either the phrases "high-stakes testing" OR "standardized testing" -- a broader search result.

"high-stakes testing" NOT United States



Finds only those records that contain the phrase "high-stakes testing" and will not present records containing the words United States-- a more limited search result.

"standardized testing" (standardized testing)

Finds only those records that contain the phrase exactly as it is typed; does not return records that merely contain the two words

B. Choose Your Research Tool and Search Terms

You will need to search some type of **search engine or database** to find books, articles, web sites, government reports, etc. Search terms that work well in one search tool might not work well in another.

For a paper on **high stakes testing**, you will need to use different search terms and strategies to find books versus articles.

To Find:	Research Tool	Search Strategy	Examples
Books, government publications	Online Catalog	Try more general terms, because books tend to be written on more general topics	<i>High-stakes testing OR standardized tests</i>
Articles	Journal Databases	Try more specific terms and combinations of terms	<i>High stakes testing AND student achievement AND math</i>

List the search tools that will help you locate information on your topic:

List some search terms:
