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THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A Student Guide

The Basic Steps in Research

1. Selecting a topic.
2. Understanding key words and concepts.
3. Finding sources (research).
4. Recording information (index cards).
5. Developing main ideas/theses.
6. Developing argument/essay outlines.
7. Writing or presenting.

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SELECTING A TOPIC

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Selecting a Topic

The Steps

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- Select a topic that interests you.
- Brainstorm some of your own ideas.
- A useful site for debate/symposium/research essays is: www.idebate.org

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- When a topic is chosen, ensure there is enough information available.
- Some topics may be too broad (too much information, categories, and subtopics) and must be narrowed to a more manageable size.

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- **Too Broad Topics :**
 - **Agriculture**
 - Economics? Workers? Crop Management? Policy? Vegetables? Crops?
 - **Religion**
 - Groups? Symbols? Origins? Leaders? History?
 - **Environment**
 - Animals? Ecology? Forestry? Global Warming? Pollution? Plants?

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- **Too Narrow:**
 - Foreign language policy Botswana.
- A topic will be narrow when you can't find any information. It may have to be broadened.

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KEY WORDS & CONCEPTS

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Understanding Key Words/Concepts

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- Time to do some preliminary research before you take notes.
- Use the Internet:
 - Do common words/concepts continue to crop up? These may end up being your sub-topics.

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- When researching background information on the novel *Waiting for the Rain*, several areas began to emerge:
 - Apartheid
 - South Africa
 - Afrikaner
 - Township of Johannesburg
- These must, then, be major focuses of the novel and would be important to understand before starting note-taking about it.




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- It is very important that a researcher understand all the key terms/concepts related to his/her topic.
 - It gives you the required background information.
 - It will help you take your research in different directions.



FINDING SOURCES


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Finding Sources

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- Most MRHS projects require a minimum of three sources.
- Don't cite everything you read as some will be repetition of information.
- Use as many resources and types of resources as you can to make arguments stronger.




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- Your best resource in research is Mrs Pendergast.
 - Use as much of her assistance as she's willing to give.




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- Feel free to use non-traditional sources: film, television, Internet, interviews, etc.
- Try to use a variety of sources, which means that at least one source should be non-Internet
 - Something from EBSCOHost is considered non-Internet, however.




Finding Sources (Reliability)

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- Most text-based sources (books, magazines) are reliable.
- The Internet is less reliable. If you're unsure:
 - See if the information can be found on a different site.
 - If it can, chances are that your information is reliable.
 - If you can locate publication information (author, publication date), then it is probably legit.




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- Publisher/Organization Info
 - It is important to investigate the author of your web page.
 - Is it reputable: Media Awareness Network, CBC, Statistics Canada?
 - Is it an advertising company (and thus biased): Pepsi, McDonalds, Kellogg's?
 - Is it a religious or protest group who might have ulterior motives: Scientology, KKK, PETA, IRA?




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- Avoid:
 - Wikipedia
 - a very good site for background information, but the information is unsecured. Check the page's references to see if the information is valid and then use the reference as your source.



Finding Sources (Reliability)


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Avoid:

- Blogs/myspace/facebook**
 - personal pages that are often opinion-based without research.
 - may be acceptable if it was written by a professional in the field (like coffinblog)



Finding Sources (Reliability)


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Avoid:

- Web pages without publication information**
 - reliable pages will reveal authorship, publication dates, and have copyright information.
 - be very cautious of those sites lacking any of this information.



Finding Sources - Citation

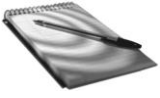
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When you find a reliable source, you must copy down the source information for a References page.

- A References page is another name for a Works Cited page.
- References pages are necessary for a reader who wants to fact-check your essay/debate/symposium.
- The References list is also crucial to avoiding **PLAGIARISM** and - if you don't list your sources - you are stealing someone else's work.



Finding Sources - Citation


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For each source you discover during research, record the information you will need for an MLA-Style reference.

- This reference includes as much of the publication information as possible:
 - Title
 - Author
 - Publication Date
 - Publication Company
 - Date of Access
 - Page Number
 - URL (Web Page Address)



Finding Sources - Citation


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For each source you find, plug the information into a citation generator like Citation Machine, which will create a proper MLA-style citation.

<http://citationmachine.net>




Sample Citation (Web Page)

29

Malarkey, Jebidiah. "The Care and Maintenance of Your Cow." Down on the Farm. 12 September 1998. Farm Critter Atlantic. 25 March 2009. <http://www.farmcritteratlantic.org/cowstuff/care.html>.

See how the second and third lines are indented? That's called a **HANGING INDENT** and it is necessary in citations.

See how the URL is on a line by itself? That is also one of the rules of citing web pages.




Sample Citation (Magazine)

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McKendrick, Loman. "Why We Can't Eat Each Other Anymore." *Cannibalism Monthly* 30 May 2004: 23-25.

Sometimes, the citation will only take up one line and that is not a bad thing either. No need for hanging indents here.

See how the magazine title is underlined? That is a rule!



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RECORDING INFORMATION

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Recording Information - Index Cards


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Index Cards

- When it comes to recording information, you must take notes.
- You must not print web pages or Internet documents.
 - Leads to plagiarism.
- You must record information on index cards.
- This will keep you organized and help you avoid intentional and unintentional plagiarism.



Recording Information - Index Cards


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You will be asked to record researched information using one of three methods:

- Summarizing
- Paraphrasing
- Quoting Directly

See other presentation for notes on each!




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Summary

- Only the main ideas of the information, written in your own words.
- Roughly 1/3 the length of the original.
- HOW DO I SUMMARIZE?
 - Read the information carefully, look away, and note what you can from memory.




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Paraphrase

- Written information from the source, in your own words.
- Usually around the same length as the original.
- HOW DO I PARAPHRASE?
 - Read the information carefully, re-write the information in your own words, leaving nothing out.




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Direct Quotes

- Taking information word-for-word from the original text.
 - Not just quotes, but any passages you take word for word.
- HOW DO I QUOTE DIRECTLY?
 - Copy text and place it in quotation marks.
 - An in-text citation must follow this information, giving credit to the source. (Coffin 99)



Sample Index Card

Food Disasters Madean's Magazine, May 2008

"What they fail to teach you in First Aid training is that during the Heimlich Maneuver, the food that is diddled from the victim's throat becomes a guided missile that almost always shoots down another person's throat, thus starting the whole thing over again". (Florence Fightengale)

Direct Quote Page 39

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DEVELOPING MAIN IDEAS

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Developing Main Ideas

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Whether it is a thesis, proposition, resolution, or main idea:

- It is a statement (or statements) declaring what you believe, what you intend to prove, what you intend to describe, a statement of purpose, or a statement of intent.




Developing Main Ideas

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Good Theses Are:

- Contestable
- Proposing an arguable point
- Is Reasonable
 - Tackling a subject that could be properly covered in the length of your paper
- Specific and Focused
- Clear
 - Asserting your point of view, based on evidence
- Relevant
 - It should pass the 'who cares' test.




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Sample Theses:

- All about the same topic, but each is narrowed to prove/argue a specific part of that topic.
 - Many children became deaf in the 1960's due to an outbreak of Rubella.
 - Deaf people raised using American Sign Language (ASL) seem to more successful than deaf people raised orally.
 - Many members of the deaf community oppose putting cochlear implants in deaf babies.
 - Deaf people think they are lucky to be deaf because they are part of a close-knit community.



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DEVELOPING ARGUMENTS & ESSAY OUTLINES


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Developing an Outline

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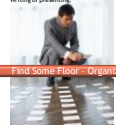
- When you have all your research in front of you - and before you write - you should create an outline of how you plan on putting all that material together on paper so it is most effective.
 - What will you lead with?
 - Which points will you need to strengthen or even delete?
 - Do you even have enough information?

Developing an Outline

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Find Some Floor - Organize!


- The sub-headings you created for your topic will prove very helpful during this stage of the process.
 - These sub-headings will become the body paragraphs of your paper, in all likelihood.
 - This is where you find some floor space, take all your index cards, and arrange them by sub-topic.
 - If you think each sub-topic has adequate information, you're good to go. If not, do some more reading.

Developing Arguments

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- Any piece you write should begin with an introduction (one or two paragraphs usually) that includes your thesis, and end with a concluding paragraph that sums up your paper and leaves your reader with a memorable 'parting shot'.
 - Leave your readers with something to think about when they're done with the paper, debate, symposium, speech, etc.

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- Any spoken presentation (debate, speech, symposium) should also begin with a section which leads to the main idea, the proposition, or resolution.
 - Similarly, it should end with a 'parting shot' that leaves the audience thinking about your topic in a new way.

Writing or Presenting

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- Give yourself time to write a thorough paper or to plan a thorough speech/presentation.
- Arrange your information in an outline before you begin.
 - Trust me...this is the smartest thing you can do before starting.

Writing or Presenting

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Citations
References


- Use your research to back up your opinions and what you already knew about the topic - do not make your piece merely a fabrication of someone else's collected work.
- Insert your researched information as summaries, paraphrases, and direct quotations, and make sure to give credit to the sources through both in-text citations and your References page.

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- When using information gained through research, make sure to comment on it.
- In formal papers, avoid the first and second person voice (I, me, we, you).
 - Speak in the third person instead (he, she, one, it, they).
 - The reader already knows this paper is based on your opinions and judgments.

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- Ensure the work is your own:
 - Avoid plagiarism
 - Keep your own unique voice.
- Leave time for editing and revising.
 - Always have someone you trust look over your work, of which you are not always the best editor.
 - It is difficult to find fault with something we are very proud of.
- Make sure you've followed all the rubric elements before submission.