

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

COMP I

ENGLISH 1301

Research Paper Guide

Quick hints on:

- ◆ selecting the most useful places to search for information
- ◆ how to efficiently search
- ◆ how to use quotations and paraphrases
- ◆ how to write the "Works Cited" list



**"The Info Game" online tutorial on Internet research:
library.austincc.edu/infogame.htm**

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Thesis Statement

Construct a sentence that expresses the **thesis** (your position on the problem you will discuss or issue you will support) of your paper and indicates the dominant development or organization of its content. Here are some examples for each basic kind of organization. The formal voice of informative or scientific writing is used.

Description (the systematic relation of parts to a unique whole):
“Scientists are now able to clone mammals.”

Narration (the presentation of sequence, as in history, plot, or process):
“Watson’s discovery of how DNA works in 1953 led to the cloning of plants and lower animals.”

Classification (the presentation of kinds of something):
“There are at least three reasons why we should not become too concerned about the cloning of human beings.”

Evaluation (a text that proceeds according to criteria):
“An argument against the cloning of humans must appeal to society’s fear and values, as well as to its sense of logic and authority.”

Write your thesis statement on the bottom of the worksheet on the very last page of this packet.

Different Sources for Different Topics

You need to think about the kind of information you need for your topic. There are several types of information sources in the library. Each type is more useful in certain ways.

INFORMATION NEEDS CHECKLIST:

Do you need background on your topic or do you already know it and only need specific information to fill in gaps?

Need background Only need specifics

Do you need hard facts, such as statistics, definitions, formulas? Yes No

Does your topic emphasize historical information or recent events more?

Historical Recent Need both

Does your topic relate more to:

- Science and technology?
- Humanities (the arts, history, philosophy, etc.)?
- Social sciences (government, business, psychology, social issues)?
- Personal interests (hobbies, sports, etc.)

NOW . . .

Read over the next section, “Why Use Different Types of Sources,” and select the ones that relate to your topic best. Remember, using a variety of sources usually makes a stronger paper.

Why Use Different Types of Sources?

REFERENCE MATERIAL

(Encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, etc. Both print and online.)

Advantages:

- Good place to start research
- Facts and statistics
- Focused summaries of topics
- Objective information
- Sources always available, can't be checked out

Limitations:

- Print reference sources sometimes slow to be published; may not cover recent topics
- Can be hard to find a specific topic in larger source

Hints in using

- Asking a reference librarian is often best way to find useful reference sources.
- Try browsing in the reference area (ask for a copy of the "Guide to Library Classification System") or use the "Research Shortcuts" at library.austincc.edu/eresources/shortcuts.htm.

WORLD WIDE WEB

Advantages:

- Huge variety of information on almost any topic
- Allows access to sources all over the world
- Very recent events may be covered

Limitations:

- Information can be unreliable; anyone can put information on the web
- Some training needed to use effectively
- Difficult to locate useful sources among the thousands often listed for topics

Hints for using

- If you don't know of a useful web site, go to the Library homepage (library.austincc.edu) and select "Find Information on the Internet" and then look at the "Recommended Web Links" for your topic.
- If you use a web search engine, such as Google, searching for *specific* topics often works best.
- Try starting with information sources other than the web, such as reference sources, when beginning research.

ACCESSING ONLINE RESOURCES FROM OFF-CAMPUS

The library's online databases you will use -- such as the periodical indexes and online encyclopedias--are accessible from off-campus. Use your name and ACC I.D. number to get to them.

BOOKS

(Both print and electronic books)

Advantages:

- Thorough exploration of topics
- Authors usually experts

Limitations:

- Maybe more information than needed for project (although specific chapters or sections can be used)
- Books you want may not be available

Hints in using

- Use the computerized library catalog by clicking on "Find Books, Course Reserves, Videos."
- Books from other campuses can be sent to your campus. You can do this online when you see the "Request" button on a catalog listing, or you can give the staff the title, call number, and campus that owns it. Delivery between campuses takes about two weekdays.
- Electronic books are listed in the library catalog along with print books. E-books can be accessed from any computer with Internet access.

PERIODICALS

(Magazines, Journals, Newspapers)

Advantages:

- Cover current events and people in the news
- Cover specific events and topics that books might ignore
- Cover local and regional issues
- Latest research in science and technology
- Social issues and "hot topics" are explored

Limitations:

- Articles may be superficial or overly specific
- Opinions may be emphasized over facts
- Information may go out of date quickly

Hints in using

- To locate articles, use an index such as those linked to from the library homepage. Click on "Find Articles and Research Information," then use the indexes recommended for your topic. *Academic Search Complete* or *Newspaper Source* are indexes that work for most topics.
- Online indexes, such as *Academic Search Complete*, have the full text of articles. If you need the actual paper copy of an article, make sure the library subscribes to the periodical you want. The library catalog lists which periodicals ACC gets.
- Articles in periodicals received at other ACC campuses can be sent to you for free. It takes two weekdays. Ask the staff for this service.

YOU CAN ALWAYS ASK A LIBRARIAN FOR HELP, IN PERSON, BY PHONE, BY CHAT, OR BY E-MAIL (library@austincc.edu). **LIBRARY WEBSITE:** <http://library.austincc.edu>

Library Search Techniques

SEARCH STRATEGY

- If you don't have a good background in your topic, reading an encyclopedia article at the start gives a foundation that is useful as you look at other sources. Knowing basic facts, dates, important people, etc. helps as you look for other information. There are many subject-specific encyclopedias that are great starting points.
- If you already know your topic fairly well, you may want to go directly to periodical articles or Internet sources that are on specific elements.
- Don't think you have to read an entire book to use it. Look in the index or table of contents to locate the specific information you need.
- Don't expect your first search to get you everything. Try different sources and different ways of searching.

KEYWORDS

Almost all computerized information sources let you search by "keywords." Computers can look for words in any order and usually in several places. Before computers, we were limited to searching alphabetical lists of topics or titles. Now, some computerized sources will search for words anywhere in the entire text of a document.

It is extremely important to identify the basic words that describe your topic. Also think of synonyms and variations on these words in case your original search doesn't get what you need. These keywords are also what you use in looking in indexes in reference books and regular books.

Example: Your topic is "Conservative vs. Liberal Approaches to Prayer in School."

Possible keywords:

- Conservative, Liberal, Politics, Political
- Prayer, Religion, Separation of Church and State
- School, Education

Use two to three keywords, usually. Searches usually get better results if only the major few keywords are used. Try searches such as: PRAYER and SCHOOL *or* RELIGION and POLITICS *or* RELIGION and EDUCATION and POLITICAL *or* SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE and PRAYER

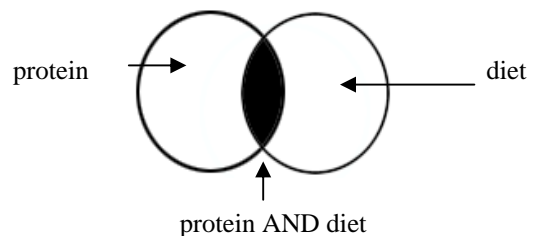
More general terms, such as RELIGION and POLITICS, work best when searching for background and historical sources (books and reference books), while specific terms, such as PRAYER and SCHOOL and LIBERAL work better on sources of specific information (periodical indexes and the web).

BOOLEAN SEARCHING: AND

Most computerized systems allow "Boolean" searches (named after mathematician Georges Boole). These are more complex search techniques that are most useful when searching large databases, such as the web. How you do these searches unfortunately varies from one system to the next. Read the help screens or ask the librarian.

AND—"And" is the most useful search technique. It combines search terms so results must include all the terms.

Example: PROTEIN and DIET will get results that have *both* words. The results are more specific.



"And" is the most important Boolean technique, but there are others. Talk to a librarian if you want to learn more. The Info Game web tutorial will also help explain Boolean searching.

PHRASE SEARCHING

Often your keywords are more than one word long, such as *genetic engineering* or *Bill Gates*. Most search engines will let you search for these exact phrases.

Usually if you put quotation marks around the words, the search results will only be for the exact phrase. For example, using the web search engine Google, adding the quotation marks around the phrase "genetic engineering" reduces the results by half. Why? Because without the quotation marks, the search engine lists any web page that mentions the two words, but they might be hundreds of words apart.

Unfortunately not all search engines use quotation marks. Read the help screens to check.

Look at the "Works Cited" section of the MLA Documentation page to see what information is required for each type of source.

Not all blanks will need to be filled in.

TYPE OF SOURCE:

Reference book | Online Reference Source | Book | Electronic book | Online Magazine | Paper Magazine | Online Newspaper | Paper Newspaper | Audiovisual | Government document | Web page | CD-ROM | Other _____

Author(s) (if given) _____

Name of Source _____

Article or chapter title _____

Publisher and city of publication _____

Date published _____ Volume number _____ Page numbers _____

URL (for Internet pages) _____

Date accessed (for Internet sources) _____

TYPE OF SOURCE:

Reference book | Online Reference Source | Book | Electronic book | Online Magazine | Paper Magazine | Online Newspaper | Paper Newspaper | Audiovisual | Government document | Web page | CD-ROM | Other _____

Author(s) (if given) _____

Name of Source _____

Article or chapter title _____

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TYPE OF SOURCE:

Reference book | Online Reference Source | Book | Electronic book | Online Magazine | Paper Magazine | Online Newspaper | Paper Newspaper | Audiovisual | Government document | Web page | CD-ROM | Other _____

Author(s) (if given) _____

Name of Source _____

Article or chapter title _____

Publisher and city of publication _____

Date published _____ Volume number _____ Page numbers _____

URL (for Internet pages) _____

Date accessed (for Internet sources) _____

WORKSHEET

PREPARE DOCUMENTATION

- Read the "MLA Documentation" section on quoting and paraphrasing
- Use the information and examples it provides to produce the following in correct style:

• Introduce a **quote** *from a book* and properly document it:

• **Paraphrase** one idea *from a book* and properly document it:

• Introduce a **quote** *from an article* and properly document it:

• **Paraphrase** one idea *from an article* and properly document it:

- Look at the "MLA Documentation" examples for "Works Cited" lists.
- Include **Works Cited** listings for both the book and the article, in alphabetical order.

- Write a thesis statement, as discussed on page 2 of this packet, that shows how you plan to organize your paper's content.
