Simple Steps to Effective Library Research:

Finding information and documenting the sources

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Today’s session will include:

A description of a simple library research process, including:

- A demonstration of the NMSU Library Catalog

  - A demonstration of how to search library databases to find journal and magazine articles and how to retrieve results.
  
  - A brief discussion of locating information on the Internet and evaluation of Websites.

  - A brief discussion of academic honesty/avoiding plagiarism as they relate to citation styles.
Simple Steps to Effective Library Research

1. Identify and Develop Your Topic
2. Locate Background Information
3. Locate Books
4. Locate Periodical Articles
5. Locate Internet Sources
6. Evaluate What You Find
7. Cite What You Use In a Standard Format

Combine Steps 2, 3 & 4… Enter search term(s) in the Discovery Search box on the Library Home Page under Search, Research
Step 1

Identify and Develop Your Topic

- Pick a topic of interest to you.
- Determine if it can be used for your assignment (consult your instructor).
- Ask yourself a question you would like to answer (who, what, when, where, why or how are good places to begin).
- Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. Think of synonyms to use or ways to narrow or broaden your topic.
Step 2

Locate Background Information

- Locate background information (may help you broaden or narrow your focus and may also provide links to other sources).

- Try searching Gale Virtual Reference Library and/or Oxford Reference.
  
  - Continue to use the keywords or concepts you identified in Step 1.

Step 3

Locate Books Using the Library Catalog
Find relevant books in the NMSU Grants Library

- Look for books by keyword (or by author, title, or subject).

- If you have trouble locating books on your topic, check with the librarian for additional searching suggestions.

- Continue to use the keywords or concepts you identified in Step 1.

**More about Books...**

- If you locate a book in another NMSU library that we do not have in our library, we can request it for you (week to receive it in the mail).
  - Books from libraries other than NMSU (about 2 weeks by mail).

- Books in the NMSU libraries are arranged according to the Library of Congress Classification System.
Refer to the handout:

*Library of Congress Classification System (LC) How to read call numbers in an academic library.*

**Step 4**

Locate Periodical Articles

- Periodical articles are good sources for detailed analysis or up-to-date information on a topic.

- To locate periodicals search the Library’s website under **Online Resources by Title** or **Online Resources by Subject**.

- Most research topics can be located in our general periodical databases: **Academic Search Premier**. There are also more specific subject databases such as Environment Complete, History Reference Center, Education Research Complete, etc.
If you don’t find articles on your topic, check with the librarian for additional database or searching suggestions. Continue to use the keywords or concepts you identified in Step 1.

More about Periodicals:
What’s the difference between a magazine and a journal?

Generally:

- Magazines have articles that are written by journalists, edited by editors with a journalism background and published by commercial publishing houses.

- Journals contain articles written by scholars: professors, researchers or other professionals. They are published by academic or professional associations and “peer-reviewed” by other scholars familiar with the field.
of research. These peer-reviewers approve the research before it is published in the journal.

More about Periodicals: Which Type Should You Use?

- The type of periodical you use for your research will depend on the topic and the requirements of your assignment as detailed by your instructor.

- For extremely current events, you may have to use a magazine article since scholarly journal articles require time to be researched and published.
Step 5

Locate Internet Sources

- Not everything on the web is reliable or accurate.
- Use a search engine, such as Google or Bing.
- Use same keywords that you have used in Steps 2 through 4.
Domain extensions (.com, .edu, .gov) can be used to help determine authority and objectivity.

Evaluate Internet resources to determine their quality and relevance to your topic before citing them for a research assignment using the CRAAP Test.

The CRAAP Test Worksheet

Use the following list to help evaluate sources. Answer the questions as appropriate and then rank each of the 5 parts from 1 to 10 (1 = unreliable, 10 = excellent). Add up the scores for an idea of whether you should use the resource (and whether your professor would want you to!).
WORKSHEET

Currency: The timeliness of the information.
- When was the info published or posted? _______
- Has it been updated? YES □ NO □
- Do you need the most current info for your topic? YES □ NO □

Relevance: The importance of the info for your needs.
- Does the information directly relate to your topic? YES □ NO □
- Does it help you answer questions? YES □ NO □
- Have you looked at other sources to find the best one? YES □ NO □

Score _______
Authority: The source of the info.
- Who is the author or publisher? [ ] YES [ ] NO
- Are they qualified to write about the topic? [ ] YES [ ] NO
- If it’s a website, does the URL say anything about the source? .com .gov .edu .org? [ ] YES [ ] NO

Accuracy: The reliability and correctness of the info.
- Is the info supported by evidence? [ ] YES [ ] NO
- Can you verify the info with another source? [ ] YES [ ] NO
- Is the author or publisher biased or unbiased? [ ] BIASED [ ] UNBIASED

Purpose: The reason the info exists.
- What is the purpose of the info? CIRCLE ONE
  - To inform, teach, sell, persuade, or entertain?
- Is the info given a fact or an opinion? [ ] FACT [ ] OPINION
- Again, is the author or publisher biased or unbiased? [ ] BIASED [ ] UNBIASED

________ What’s the overall score?
________ Will you use this resource or not?
Step 6

Evaluate What You Use

Take a step back and look at the resources you have gathered; consider:

- The CRAAP Test for all of the resources you have gathered including: books, periodical articles or Web pages whether you are looking at a citation to the source, a physical item in hand, or an electronic version on the computer.

Step 7

Cite What You Use in a Standard Format

Documenting or “citing” the sources you use in your research serves two purposes:

- 1) giving proper credit to the author(s) of the material.
- 2) allows instructor to locate materials in your list of cited sources.
More about Citing Sources

- **MLA** (Modern Language Association) and **APA** (American Psychological Association) citation style are most commonly used.

- Print manuals can be located at the Library Service Desk or in the Student Success Center.


- See Purdue University’s Online Writing Laboratory (OWL) located at: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

**Need More Help?**

Who to ask on campus for assistance  Type of assistance provided

- Course instructor  Can assist you with your topic
selection and (sometimes) writing

• Librarian• Can assist you with research strategy, physically locating resources online and in print and locating citation manuals/sites

• Student Success Center staff

• Can assist you with writing and proper citation formats