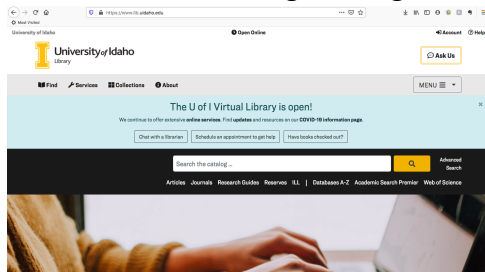# Research Strategies

Before you can begin researching, it is important to decide on a clear and focused topic. However, narrowing a topic can be difficult. To help ease the process, here are a few key points to remember. First, make sure that your topic is something that has ample research to back it up. If your topic is too broad, it will be hard to find factual evidence that supports it. Another helpful way to decide whether or not your topic is specific enough is to ask whether your topic is arguable. Can another student find factual evidence that opposes your side or point of view? If your topic is too broad, a person won't be able to argue against it; on the flip side, if your topic is too narrow, no one will be able to argue against it either.

Let's look at an example. I have to write a 5-page paper for a research class where I present the issue and a possible solution. The topic I have chosen is endangered birds. While I could write a 5-page paper about endangered birds, I would not be able to include all of the important and relevant information about them that I would want since there are 461 endangered birds; I need to narrow my topic. What if I narrow my topic to birds on the verge of extinction? Is that narrow enough? As of 2019, there are 14 on the endangered list. I don't think I will be able to write about 14 birds in five pages. So let's narrow it once again. Of the list of birds on the brink of extinction, I know that the Himalayan Quail is one. Now that I have narrowed my topic, I can begin researching why the Himalayan Quail is on the verge of extinction along with possible solutions to keep it from going extinct. While someone may not be able to argue that this bird is *not* on the brink of extinction, they will be able to argue my ideas for a solution, thus the topic I have chosen is narrow enough!
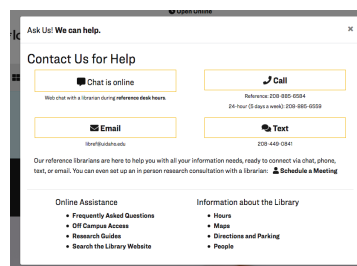
Library

When it comes time to begin researching, the process can seem daunting. Luckily, as students, we have access to the UI Library and all of its amazing and wonderful resources!

First, let's take a look at the website. If you don't already have it, here is the URL https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/. Once you have found the home page, in the top right hand corner there is an "Ask Us" button. Once you have clicked on it, the "Ask Us" menu will allow you to choose between calling, texting, chatting online or emailing a librarian.

UI Library Home page, "ask us" button in top right.   **"Ask Us" menu**

Contacting a reference librarian in the beginning of the research process can be especially beneficial since they are experts in research. They can help you identify applicable databases, discover key words to search in order for you to find the most relevant and helpful sources, and they can help you identify whether or not a source is peer reviewed and suitable to be used as a reference.

Databases

When researching a topic, it can be hard to process a lot of articles, papers, and journals all at once; however, databases allow you to search by keyword(s), giving you multiple articles related to your specific topic. While databases can be extremely helpful, it is important that you choose databases that will give you the most resources related to your topic. In order to know which database to use, you will first want to navigate to the UI Library website. Below the search bar you will find a few options for databases. The first option being "Databases A-Z. I recommend clicking on this one first. Once you have clicked on it, a drop down menu will appear offering a plethora of databases ranging from health and medicine to history, from business to science, and everywhere in between.

If you are uncertain of where to begin searching, a few popular databases that contain articles ranging many topics are Academic Search Premier, MLA International Bibliography and Web of Science. While the first offers a very wide range of articles, MLA International Bibliography and Web of Science contain more focused articles and journals. MLA International Bibliography offers articles pertaining to a wide array of topics but often connects them to literary works and art while Web of Science focuses on an array of topics related to biology, chemistry and physics, along with topics such as the study of the usability of food containers. No matter what you are researching, there is a database for you!

Key Words

Once you have chosen a database to search from, it is time to decide on a few keywords that will lead you to the most relevant sources. While searching databases and journals, it is important to know that the words you use and order you type them dictates which articles will pop up. If you type the phrase "wildflowers in Australia", the search engine will show you articles with "wildflowers in Australia" in the title; however, any articles titled with names such as "Australian Wildflowers" will not show up in your search since the ordering of the words is different than what you typed. Below are a few tips on how to type in keywords to obtain the best search results.

- ·   It's best not to type in your research question.
- ·   Pick and choose the words that encapsulate the main focus of your research topic.
- ·   Type "AND" between each word. In doing so it separates phrases allowing databases to search for each individual word.
- ·   Exclude words such as "contrast", "pro" and "con". Articles don't often have comparison words in their titles.

Is My Article/Source Reliable?

Once you have chosen keywords and found a few sources, you need to ensure that each source is reliable, meaning that the facts and topics discussed within the source are presented by experts and backed by facts. One easy way to ensure reliability is to check if the source has been peer reviewed. In order for an article to be peer reviewed, it must be sent to other experts in the same field. For example, after typing our key words from the section above, (wildflower AND Australia AND evolution), but before hitting go, in the left hand side of most databases is a "refine results" tab. And on that tab is the option to select "Scholarly Journals/Peer Reviewed". This identifier helps you, the researcher, because it limits the search to only peer reviewed articles. If this option is not available, another way to ensure that a source is reputable (fit for a scholarly paper) is to check where the article was published. Once you have clicked on an article, the first information that you will see is often the title, author(s), source, document type and subject terms. The source information tells you where the article has been published. If the source was published by a journal, it was most likely peer reviewed. Journals often require their articles to be thoroughly researched and reviewed before publishing.

Another way to identify whether or not a source is reliable is to check if it is from a well-known publisher. A few reliable news media sites are *The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune, National Geographic, The Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, BBC, The Associated Press, The Atlantic, Reuters, NPR,* and *Politico.* As long as your topic is pertinent, you will be able to find reliable and reputable research. That said, avoid relying on Wikipedia and similar sites. They can be great places to gain a broad view of a topic, but it's important to go to the original sources cited.

Is My Source Relevant?

Once you have found a source relating to your topic, it is always good to ask whether your source is relevant. When writing a paper, you don't want to refer to sources that are outdated or veer off topic. First, check the source's publication date. A good rule of thumb for articles is to focus on sources that have been published in the last five years; however, only use this as a guide--some topics will require much older publications, and many classic articles are still cited today. It is up to you to decide if the information present is still current to today's research and thinking.

Conclusion

This handout provided information for how to research information to support ideas and claims in your paper. Remember, the main points of effective research are to choose a narrow topic, use library databases to access credible sources, and double-check that your sources are reliable and relevant. Finding a narrow topic and then effectively using university-provided research tools are important steps in constructing a good research paper!