How to Start Your Research

Having a difficult time knowing where to start your research? This guide will give you a brief introduction to know how to go about starting your research process. Research is a PROCESS, not a one-time event. The steps below may look different for your process and may even be in a different order. The most important thing is to be patient, curious, and flexible. You can do this!
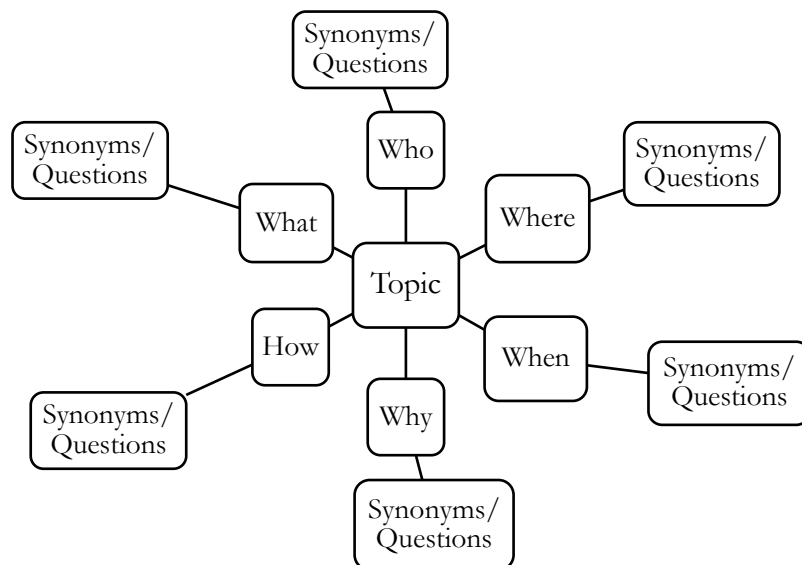
Establish a Topic

Knowing what to write your paper about may be daunting. If you need help picking a topic, there are a few websites you can go to get ideas and background information:

- Gale Opposing Viewpoints
- Gale Newsstand
- Wikipedia
- Google

(The first two websites can be found by going to the library website (lib.byu.edu) and going to the green "Databases" tab)

Once you have a broad idea, make a word map to explore different avenues of your topic. Explore the who, what, where, why, when, and how of your topic. Write as many keywords or synonyms for your topic as you can.

Background Research

Before you go rushing into the databases, you first want to lay some groundwork for your topic. Using the listed resources above, try to get as much background information as you can. If this is a topic you are already familiar with, this step may be shorter or you may skip it altogether. If you are unfamiliar with this topic, spend time here to make some notes, add to your word map, or define unfamiliar words. Start to form a broad outline for the direction of your topic.

Dive into the Research

Here are some important things to keep in mind with academic research:

- Academic research has different and more scientific language than popular sources (sources written by and for the general public). You may need to have another tab open to look up unfamiliar words
- Academic articles get very specific so do not get discouraged if you do not find any articles that address your entire topic. It is better to find specific research articles for specific aspects of your topic.
- Some articles will be behind a paywall. If you are off-campus, log into your BYU account on the library website to get access. Copy and paste the article title into the library's search bar or look up the article in Google Scholar to see if it has open access. When in doubt, contact the Research and Writing Center.

Once again, research is a process so the articles you find now will help give you further direction for your topic and paper. This may also mean that the articles you find now may become more or less useful as your topic becomes more defined and focused. Revisiting the databases throughout your entire research and writing process is normal and encouraged.

Here are some databases you help you get started:

Open Access (meaning they are free for everyone to use. You can look up these databases on Google)	
Google Scholar	Multidisciplinary: Provides articles in all research areas/topics
JSTOR	Multidisciplinary with a focus on humanities, political science, and primary sources
Government websites	On a new google tab, type in "site:.gov" followed by any topic you would like government information on
Library Databases (meaning you must look these up on the library website under the "Databases" or "Research Guides" tab)	
EBSCO (Academic Search Ultimate)	Multidisciplinary: Select "choose databases" to select other specific disciplinary databases
Web of Science	Contains mostly STEM subjects with some social sciences
Compendex	Main Engineering database
Scopus	Multidisciplinary including science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and humanities
MEDLINE	Also known as PubMed. Including medicine and life sciences subjects
ProQuest	Very similar to EBSCO in that there are specific databases within ProQuest that can be searched

If you are having a hard time finding sources, go to the "Research Guides" button on the library website and select the subject guide that relates to your topic. There you will find a subject librarian and list of suggested databases.

Important note: Most databases have temporary links. To save your articles to read for later, save them to a bibliography manager (like RefWorks), find a permalink or DOI, copy and paste the title and author in a document, or download the PDF.