

Research Checklist

by Sheree Fu, Librarian, Claremont Colleges Libraries

Understand the instructor's assignment.

Has a topic already been assigned or have you selected a topic?

What do you already know about the subject?

How much information do you need? Is your assignment a five minute speech or a ten page paper?

What kind of information do you need? Scholarly research or general interest?

Develop the topic and do preliminary or background research.

Use reference textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories and other guides to help you set the context of your research.

Make a list of keywords and phrases that describe the concepts of your topic. These should include synonyms, variations in spelling (US vs UK), word endings (singular, plural), variant terminology (electrocardiograms, electrocardiography), and related terms/concepts

Focus the topic and find current information.

Keep a record of which databases were searched, where specific citations were found, and which words were used in the searched

Take the time to write down your topic in the form of a question and consider it from all angles.

Try to be specific about what it is you want to discover about your topic. Then break out key ideas or concepts.

Use journal, newspaper and magazine articles that generally provide the most up-to-date and focused information on a specific topic.

Evaluate what you find.

Take a look at your results. Are you finding too much, too little on your topic?

Refine your topic if necessary to either broaden or narrow its scope. You may need to try different resources or terms, look into article indexes that you had passed over earlier. Talk to a reference librarian or set up a reference consultation if you need help.

Don't forget to properly cite what you find.

Keep detailed notes about what you find and where you found it. No one likes to be finishing up his/her research, only to find their references are incomplete or missing – and have to spend time “researching” their research.

Find out what citation style is preferred (APA, MLA, etc.) and use it consistently.

Sources:

<http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/files/Research%20checklist%202007.pdf>

<http://www.uri.edu/library/guides/general/checklist.html>

Writing Checklist

by Justin Young, Director of the Writing Center, Claremont McKenna College

Develop a research question

Based upon preliminary research choose a central question to guide your research. This question can (and probably should!) be revised as you do more research.

Your question should be situated within available scholarship on the topic; it should add to what's already been done.

Make sure that your question can be answered: is there enough information on the issue or topic? Is it researchable?

Tip: Narrow your topic, but don't make it too small. Often, you can narrow your question by focusing on a time period or location.

Questions to begin:

What do you already know about your research topic/ question?

What will you need to find out in order to answer it?

Has my research question been asked before?

What is the purpose of my project? Do I need to make an argument, or is my paper informational?

Drafting

Create an outline before you begin writing.

Organize your paper around a thesis that answers your research question.

Be sure to critically analyze the sources/ texts that you use as evidence—don't just data dump!

Tip: If you have trouble getting started, write about what you know. Do the easy part first!

Revising

Questions for revision:

What is your thesis? Is it clear? Have you fully answered your research question?

Does each section of your paper follow your thesis? Do you cue the reader by reminding her how each section relates back to your thesis?

Have you used the required citation style correctly and consistently?

Tip: Do a reverse outline of your paper after you have finished it! Also, provide a roadmap of your paper for your reader in the introduction.