



Gathering Information

STEP ONE Question Analysis

DECIDE ON A TOPIC

Make this class interesting for yourself by picking a topic that's of genuine interest to you. Some students use this class to conduct research they can use to contribute toward another class's project, such as: Basic Texts or Mass Media and Society. Some students use this class to research issues they deal with in their personal lives, such as: ADHD, illnesses or other health issues. Some students use this class to expand their knowledge on hobbies, political or social issues, or any other area of interest. Keep in mind that some topics will lend themselves to following the seven-step search strategy easier than others. But, literally any topic should work.

NARROW AND DEFINE THE SCOPE OF YOUR RESEARCH

After deciding on a topic, the next step is to narrow and define the scope of your research. Narrowing and defining the scope of a research project helps you stay on track and ensures that the volume of research you gather will remain manageable – both time wise (you're on a tight schedule) and with your line of thought/investigation (you're limited to the amount of pages you can use for discourse). You'll do this by deciding on which questions you want to answer with your research. Remember, the questions you propose in the Question Analysis part of the search (Step 1) **MUST** be addressed in your synthesis (Step 7). So, if somewhere along the line your focus shifts – you will need to re-do these first steps to reflect your new focus.

IDENTIFY YOUR SEARCH TERMS

Once you've defined the scope of your research project, discover the various search terms you can use to retrieve information by looking up your topic in the Library of Congress Subject Heading and a Thesaurus.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADING: BACKGROUND ON THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

All American libraries use an indexing and filing system created by the Library of Congress.

- The Library of Congress is one of our oldest cultural institutions. It was established by Congress April 24, 1800 with an appropriation of \$5,000. (Just after the capital relocated in Washington DC from Philadelphia.)
- Since World War II, it has become the world's largest library. Today it resides in three buildings on Capital Hill: The Thomas Jefferson Building (built in 1897 - Jefferson was the library's principal founder), the John Adams Building (built in 1938), and the James Madison Memorial Building (built in 1980).
- In 1814 when the British invaded Washington, they destroyed the Capitol including the Library of Congress. Jefferson, who had already retired to Monticello, offered to sell Congress his personal library of more than six thousand volumes to Congress to make up for the loss. His personal library was more than double the size of the original Library of Congress.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADING BOOKS

• The Library of Congress Subject Heading Books can be located inside the university's Neumann Library directly in front of the Reference Desk. They are the big red books residing on a podium. They list the subject headings that libraries will use to index and file books by. You look up your topic in the LCSH and it will give you the different terms that your topic can be accessed under. For example it will list your topics Broad Term, Narrow Term, Related Term, etc.

The LCSH book will use these abbreviations:

BT = Broader Term

NT = Narrower Term

RT = Related Term

SA = See also

UF = Used For any term listed after UF is not a valid term.

EXAMPLE USING “Affirmative Action” as the chosen topic:

Topic = Affirmative action program

BT = Discrimination in employment

NT = Reverse discrimination in employment

RT = Minorities - Employment

UF = Equal employment opportunity

EXAMPLE USING “Internet” as the chosen topic:

Topic = Internet

Broad Term = Telecommunications and/or Computer

Narrow Term = Internet (it will probably even be broken up into its different aspects: Internet Search Engines, Internet email, etc.)

Related Term = World Wide Web

THESAURUS

The search terms you find in the LCSH will be useful for looking up your topic using library indexes. However, these terms may not work as well as synonyms found in a thesaurus for online searches.

Note for example that the topic “Internet” used above has the following synonyms not used by the LCSH, such as: online, virtual, and information highway.

Sometimes topics have to be broken in to separate words. For example if your search is on the invention of the Internet, you would look up synonyms for both the words “invention” and “Internet.” Those synonyms could then be used in a variety of combinations.

EXAMPLE OF SYNONYMS:

1. Synonyms for “invention:” creation, discovery, origin, birth of . . .
2. Synonyms for “Internet:” World Wide Web. . .

EXAMPLES OF SEARCH TERMS:

1. Invention of the Internet or Internet Invention
2. Origin of the Internet or Internet Origins
3. Birth of the Internet
4. Invention of the World Wide Web

SEARCH TIPS:

Note that the arrangement of the search term words can make a difference in the results. It is important to play around with the variety of search terms and word arrangement.

It's also important to play around with your search by moving from broad to narrow terms or vice-versa. For example, if you're having trouble with finding information on your topic, say at Step Six – Institutional Data, by using the search term "Internet," you may need to broaden the search term and use "Telecommunications" or "Computer" instead.