



# LIBRARY RESEARCH

*Getting Started in the Worcester State University Library*

(508)  
929-8027



CIRCULATION: (508) 929–8524

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ACCESS SERVICES: (508)929–8801

Selecting a topic is often the most challenging part of doing research.

Whether your professor has assigned you a topic or you are required to select one on your own, make sure that:

- It is *interesting*. If you are curious about the subject, your interest will make the research process more enjoyable for you and result in better reading for your professor.
- *Identify* your topic and select the main concepts. Brainstorm keywords that you can search.
- It is *manageable*. Be sure that you can complete the assignment within the established time line and meet the paper or presentation length.
- Begin your research with *background information* to make sure there is enough material to pursue your topic.

## *Semester Hours*

*Mon to Thursday:*

*8am–11pm*

*Friday: 8am–5pm*

*Saturday: 9am–5pm*

*Sunday: 1pm–9pm*

[www.worcester.edu/library](http://www.worcester.edu/library)

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## Background Information (Searching the Web)



Why do you need background information? For most research projects, gathering background information provides you with a solid understanding of your topic.

- If you don't know a great deal about your topic, an overview can help you **organize** ideas. If you're already familiar with your topic, background information can help you **narrow** your scope to a manageable topic for your research paper.
- A good Web resource that has features to help you narrow/expand your topic is [Ask.com](http://Ask.com)
- The Library Website has links to good *quality* subject-specific encyclopedias, dictionaries and specialized handbooks on the Web on our page called [Reference Shelf](#)

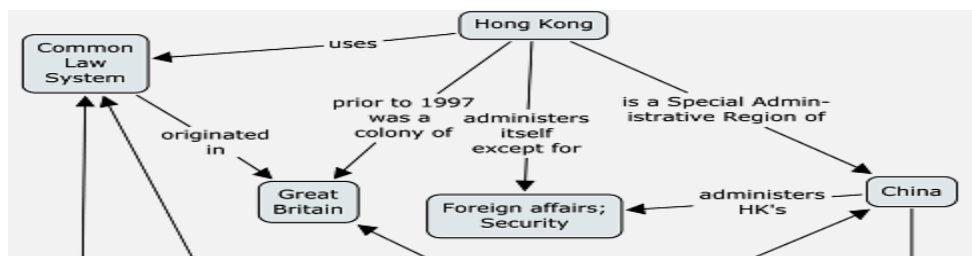
\*\* Additional background may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, Blackboard links and library reserve readings. Don't hesitate to seek out your professor for his/her help and some suggestions in setting the right context for your research.

## Define Your Research Question (What exactly are you searching for?)



It is not enough to simply choose a broad topic and start searching. Brainstorm! What are key words that describe your topic? What are the main concepts? What are you trying to prove/ disprove? Who will be impacted by this issue: communities, businesses, government, schools, individuals; boys/girls, kids/adults, racial/ethnic, local/national/global?

\*There are a couple of ways that you can refine or focus your research. The first is a **visual** method where you write down all the keywords that describe your topic and then draw lines connecting the main issues and people impacted by the topic. This is called **concept mapping** and your drawing can look something like this:



\*Another way that you can narrow your topic is to refine it like this:

Your topic:		
<b>Broad Topic</b>	Computer games	
<b>Restricted Topic</b>	Computer game violence	
<b>Narrowed Topic</b>	Computer game violence & children	
<b>Research Question</b>	How does violence in computer games affect children?	

# 1

**Getting Started** This page on the Library Website is in an easy outline format with links to help you find books, journal articles, and research help, including a link to a **free** 24/7 live chat service for research assistance. There is also a link to citation manuals and a page with all the research steps in this guide called [Research 101\(in a Nutshell\)](#).

## **Library Catalog (Start with what we own)**

The WSU Library's [online catalog](#) contains records for all books (including E-books), **journal titles**, videos/DVDs and any other items contained in our library collections. The **Keyword** search option is very useful if you don't know an exact title, or want to browse a subject. When you find an item that is useful, you can open the link for it and click on the **Subject Headings** to "find more like it."



**Use the Library Catalog** to identify books on your topic. Books are a great way to get overviews on your topic written by subject experts, get an historical perspective, and help you find multiple perspectives on the same topic. You can also consult the footnotes and bibliographies found in a book for *more* related material on your topic.



## **Why Use Library Databases ?**

While there is a good deal of useful information on the Web/Internet, remember that *it is not peer-reviewed, often not updated, and frequently inaccurate*. **Library Databases** contain highly specialized information, are restricted to use by the WSU community because they contain electronic versions of scholarly articles from traditional print magazines and journals – **these are the kinds of sources that your instructors expect you to use**.

Although some research journals are appearing on the Internet, the vast majority will still be in paper or in costly subscription databases. Specially packaged or commercial information products such as *Academic One File*, *Lexis-Nexis* or *ProQuest* are **not** available free on the Web.



## **Selecting a Database (How do you choose?)**

There are many types of materials stored in library databases and there are hundreds of databases available. In fact, selecting the best one for your research can be confusing. Searching for scholarly material is a little like being a detective. First you have to know where to look.

- There are 20 [Subject Guides](#) on the Library Website that organize library subscription databases by **broad subject categories**, as well as listing the **best** of free websites. If you can't find an appropriate database, start with a [General/Multi-Disciplinary Database](#) that covers many disciplines such as *Academic Search Complete* or *Academic One File*.

## Data Mining in Library Databases (Find more of what you're looking for)

<b>Subject Terms:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*<a href="#">SCHOOL violence</a></li><li>*<a href="#">VIDEO games</a></li><li>*<a href="#">HOMICIDE</a></li><li>*<a href="#">STUDENTS -- Crimes against</a></li><li>*<a href="#">SCHOOL shootings</a></li><li><a href="#">VIOLENCE in video games</a></li></ul>
<b>Applied Keywords:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><a href="#">aggression</a></li><li><a href="#">computer games</a></li><li><a href="#">mass media</a></li><li><a href="#">school violence</a></li><li><a href="#">violence</a></li></ul>

Databases don't work like Internet search engines. If you start searching by using keywords that describe your topic, this can often return many irrelevant results.

Browse through your results list and look at 2-3 of the most relevant results. Notice the **Subject** or **Descriptor** field in those records and note the terms used. It is usually not easy to guess which subject headings are used in a given database.

- Redo your search using the subjects or descriptors you identify. Your results can be much more *precise* than those from your initial keyword search.
- Savvy searchers use these techniques to find items that focus on a specific concept. A subject or descriptor search may result in a smaller number of search results, but they will have a higher degree of *relevancy*.
- It also may be helpful to consult the database's *thesaurus* to identify the correct subject term. Knowing the "language" of the database will help you locate the best matches.

## Full-text Not Online?

If you've searched a database and found the citation [reference] for an article which is perfect for your research project – congratulations! But beware: not every article in every database is available full-text. *Don't despair – you still have options:*



- Re-evaluate other articles you found. Another may be as good, or better. Beware, however, of selecting articles simply because the full-text is online; this is *not* good research practice. In fact, some non-full text databases do a better job of covering a particular subject area, such as *Psych Info*, *Medline* or *Cambridge Scientific Abstracts*.
- Don't discount a database just because it doesn't have full-text articles. You can still obtain copies of articles. Click on the [Getting Started](#) link in the right menu on the Library Website for links to:
  - Check to see if the [WSU Library](#) subscribes to the journal. Every journal title (along with the years we own) is listed in the online catalog, whether in print, electronic or microfilm format
  - Check the [E-Journal Finder](#) tool to see if the journal is in one of our online databases. Sometimes a journal that is not full text in *one database* is available full text in another database

- Check to see if the full-text is available in our collection of [e-journals](#).
- Check to see if a [local library](#) subscribes to the journal.
- Finally, if you have time to wait, ask for a photocopy of the article from the [Interlibrary Loan Service](#) at the Circulation Desk (average 4-10 days wait).



### Use the Right Tool (One size does not fit all)

There are many different resources to use for your research. Some may not be appropriate for every topic, but you should be aware that information today comes in many packages.

Source	Tool	Appropriate for...
Associations	<i>Encyclopedia of Associations</i> (Ref HS17/G334) or <a href="#">Reference Shelf</a>	Organizations can help you with professional studies on your topic.
Web	Search Engines ( <a href="#">ASK</a> )	Overview information (helps expand or narrow your topic), company reports, some free journal articles. Lots of variety. Need to evaluate the authority of sites.
<a href="#">Newspapers</a>	<i>Newspaper Source</i> (EBSCO), <i>Lexis-Nexis</i> , or individual <i>newspaper databases</i>	News and trade publications. Not scholarly, but useful for opinions, dates, current events, and journalistic analysis
Magazines, Scholarly Journals	<a href="#">Databases</a> such as <i>Academic One File</i> , <i>ERIC</i> , <i>PsycInfo</i> , <i>Grove Art Online</i> , etc.	Information varies in depth of scholarship. Each database will have a different focus. Be sure to read the descriptions.
Books (including E-books), Reference Works, Annual Reviews	<a href="#">Library Catalog</a>	More in-depth coverage or overview / background information, historical perspective.

### Searching Tips (Expect to revise your search often)



*Library research is a complex and ever-changing process.*

- You may need to make a trip to the library to use materials or research tools and receive **help** from a librarian. Remember, you want to use the **best** information for your research, NOT just what is available online from home.
- **Allow time for gathering** materials that are not available at WSU. The *Interlibrary Loan* service can borrow articles and books from other libraries, but this process takes anywhere from 4 to 10 days. 95% of what we receive is obtained at no charge.
- **Also allow time for reading**, taking notes, synthesizing, revising your research strategy or conducting additional research as new questions come up.



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Electronic Resources Librarian 2/09