

# Research Problems to Avoid

## Jumping into Research Prematurely, Unprepared

It would be unwise just to try to dive right into heavy research and expect a grade “A” paper to emerge effortlessly. Good research requires energy and careful consideration. It also helps if you prepare *a little*:

- Bring scrap paper and pens/pencils to take notes. Forgot? Inquire at Reference.
- Bring money (quarters or dollar bills) in case you need to photocopy reference materials.
- Bring a USB flash drive in case you need to type and save information.
- Read the assignment completely and determine (ask your instructor if necessary) what kinds of sources you can or should use (electronic, journals, newspapers, websites, etc.).
- Allow yourself one or more hours (not minutes) to gather basic information.
- See if you can establish an outline and an overall strategy of what you want to look up and what you ultimately would like your research to say or prove.
- If time permits, try to develop an understanding and appreciation of topics or persons you need to look up and the contexts (historical, cultural, philosophical, etc.) in which they exist. The better you know your topic, the more competently and convincingly you can write about it!

## Discouraged by Difficulties

You might find there is *no single book or website on your topic*. While this *definitely* means you will need to work at your topic or adjust your overall approach, this can also be an exciting opportunity to bring ideas together in new ways! Do not dwell on any difficulties. Consider it a challenge –one you will *win!*

## Using Just One Information Source

Whenever possible, try not to rely on one source. Getting *multiple* perspectives on a topic can help you better understand a subject while detecting possible bias, inaccuracies, or other shortcomings in sources.

## Avoiding Contradictory Evidence and Views

If you only embrace information sources supporting your views, your research can become *inconsiderate, imbalanced, inconclusive, and incomplete*. “Opposing views,” statements, and facts can be extremely useful and educational even if you disagree with them or seek to prove something to the contrary.

## Not Engaging in Critical and Creative Thinking

Research is not merely about “finishing an assignment”: it is about learning how to work *creatively* with ideas, developing your own abilities to *think*, ask questions, *interpret* information, and *express* yourself. Take a more *active* role in your research by actively considering all information you encounter. Reconsider each source consulted. Try not to accept “facts” without verification in another source.

## Limiting Yourself to the Internet

Not *everything* is online, and search engines are *not always* the answer. Libraries offer *many* specialized encyclopedias (print and electronic), databases, journals, and many other free tools that can make research easier and help you find facts fast. Ask a librarian what research options exist for your topic.

## Simple Keyword Searches

Internet searching seems to have conditioned many researchers to describe research topics *too* simply and rely exclusively on keyword searches. *Unspecific* or *inaccurate* search terms often lead to poor search results. Using more *precise* search terms along with *advanced search* methods can help you locate more specific and relevant information. See our “Advanced Searches” flyer for more on that.

## Sources – Citing Them Properly

There are two common problems in this area: failing to document sources of information you used or documenting sources you did *not* use. Remember to attribute all quotes and facts correctly (and in the right style – MLA, etc.), but do not bother to pad “Works Cited” pages with books you did not consult.

## Waiting Until the Last Minute

Please do *not* do this. Give yourself *plenty* of time. Visit your library as early as possible so you have timely access to library materials - or a couple of weeks to *request items from other libraries* if necessary.

## Not Asking for Assistance

Your instructor and your local library are eager to help you make the most of your education and research activities. Whenever unsure, ask a librarian! *Not asking* is one of the biggest mistakes you can make!