Library Quick Guide: 
Getting Started With Research

Step 1. Choose a topic:

- Click on the Research Help tab at the top of the Library’s home page.
- Choose The Research Process from the resulting dropdown menu. Step 1 of this Guide will help in providing ideas and links to databases, websites or books that feature current issues and events.

Step 2. Decide where to search for and locate the information you need.

- How much do you already know about your topic? For basic information, check an encyclopedia or reference book.

Do you need:

- **Books?** On the Library’s web page, use the Easy Search option for the Library Catalog (See the Searching the Library’s Catalog Quick Guide to learn how to search the Library Catalog.)

- **Journal/newspaper articles?** Click on Databases to determine which databases would be best to use. (See the Searching Academic Search Complete Quick Guide or Finding a News Article in NexisUni Quick Guide for information on searching those two specific databases.)

- **Web sites?** How do you know if a web site is reliable and/or credible? (See the Evaluating Information Quick Guide.)

**All of the Library’s Quick Guides can be found at http://library.cscc.edu/quickguides**
Step 3. Search for information on your topic using **keywords**.
These are words or phrases that best describe the information you need.

- **Example:** If you want to know what effect global warming has on agriculture, your keywords or phrases might be "global warming" or **agriculture and effects**.

- Are there different ways to phrase your search? Think of as many different keywords as you can that describe your topic.

- **Example:** If you’re looking for information about athletes and steroid use, you could use **athletes and steroids, sports and drug use, sports and performance enhancing drugs**, etc.

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**Searching Tip**

Avoid **stop** words.

The top ten **stop** words are: **the of to a an in for is on that**.

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Step 4. Refine your topic.

Is your topic too broad (too many results) or too narrow (not enough results)?

- To **narrow** your search: combine more than one keyword or phrase with **AND**.
  
  **(Example:** "gun laws" **AND** Ohio will only display articles that mention gun laws and the state of Ohio).

- To **expand** your search: combine more than one keyword or phrase with **OR**.
  
  **(Example:** "professional athletes" **and** (wages **OR** salaries)).

  **Note:** using **OR** is especially helpful when there are multiple keywords with the same meaning, such as wages, salaries, payments, etc.

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**More Searching Tips:**

Most databases provide an option to use **truncation** or **wild cards**. Not every database uses the same symbol. The examples below tend to be the most commonly used symbols.

- **Truncation:** Use the asterisk (*) to truncate a word.
  
  **(Example:** garden* will find results with garden, gardens, gardening, gardener, etc.)

- **Wildcards:** Use the **question mark** (?) to replace a letter in a word.
  
  **(Example:** wom?n finds woman or women)

- **Phrase searching:** Use **quotes** (" __") around words that appear together.
  
  **(Example:** “genetic engineering” )

For a detailed tutorial on how to conduct research, visit the Library Research Guide, [The Research Process](https://library.cscc.edu/).

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**Questions? Ask a Librarian!**

Columbus Campus: Library, Columbus Hall  Reference Desk: 614.287.2460
Delaware Campus: The Learning Center, Moeller Hall  Service Desk: 740.203.8183

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