

1. Read your syllabus and/or assignment guidelines. Remember, professors will often add the research component for the class into the syllabus and will not give out a separate assignment sheet. Either way, be sure to read the assignment closely and refer back to it often throughout the research process to ensure that you're following the professor's guidelines.
 - Ask yourself what the professor wants you do for the assignment.
 - Do you have a choice in the topic?
 - What are the length and source requirements?

Knowing these details early in the research process will make your job that much easier as the quarter progresses.

2. Choose a topic early, if possible.
 - Be sure to choose a topic that you like, keeping in mind, of course, the professor's requirements for the assignment.
 - Start by brainstorming ideas and doing preliminary research to get a feel for what you like and what's out there for you to use.

Note—don't just choose a topic because you think there's a lot written about the subject. Chances are that others have chosen that topic as well and want the same books you do.

- When considering a topic, think about what has intrigued you the most in your coursework so far. Is there an issue that you feel hasn't been fully addressed and that you'd like to learn more about?
- If you're still stuck, try freewriting to help get at ideas you perhaps weren't aware of before.
- Be sure that you don't confuse a subject with a topic. While a subject is a good place to start, it's not the final or overall direction of the paper. If you try to begin research with just a subject in mind, you'll find the process overwhelming.

subject: green design vs. **topic:** designing retail space to meet LEED guidelines

- Once you've hit on an idea you like, ask yourself what you know about the topic and what you want to learn about it. The answers to these questions are what will guide you toward the right research.
- Take your initial ideas/research and form them into a question, one that you really want to know the answer to. This question must be more than a yes/no question or you won't have much to write about.

Yes or No Do companies misrepresent the environmental advantages of their products?

Better How do companies represent or misrepresent the environmental advantages of their products?¹

Be sure to ask yourself whether this is a question you have a reasonable chance of answering. If you're unsure after doing preliminary research, you should consult your professor or a reference librarian for more help.

- Keep an open mind and prepare to make changes to your topic as you continue research.
3. Formulate a working thesis—this is the answer to your research question and it will help you to determine what kind of research you will need to do.
 4. Some suggest keeping a research log—notes of your research, ideas, etc. While this might be too time consuming, depending on the other projects you have to complete, it is a good idea to keep organized notes of your brainstorming, ideas, preliminary research, etc. These will help during the drafting stage of the writing process, but are also helpful if you decide to consult your professor or a librarian.
 5. Make a plan. Create a timeline for yourself, based on the professor's syllabus, and stick to it. Begin as early as possible and never wait until the last minute.
 6. Consider a variety of resources—primary, secondary, field research, etc.
 7. Go to the library and go early. Don't trust that the sources you need will be there later in the quarter.

¹ Toby Fulwiler and Alan R. Hayakawa, *The Blair Handbook*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 162.

Suggestions for making the most of your library visit

- Go to the library early and prepare to take notes.
- Consult general resources—dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases—before you look for specific ones. These will provide a general overview of your topic and even help lead you to more specific sources.
- Ask a librarian for help. It's their job and they love it. But make sure you have a specific question for them, something more than "I need help with research."
- Bring a copy of your syllabus, assignment, and any notes you've taken so far. Be sure, however, that you're able to explain the assignment in your own words: its scope, sources required, due date, etc.
- Explain your working topic and any research questions you've developed.
- Describe any work you've done so far and what kinds of research you'd like to find.