Do Your “PreSearch!”

1). Choose your topic. In the very beginning stages of the research process, you may have a very general idea for a topic or might have difficulty choosing a topic. This is normal!

2). Find an overview or gather background information about your topic. Oftentimes, reference books or electronic reference resources (see the Library Homepage >> Research Tools >> Online Dictionaries and Encyclopedias) are a great way to start your research! This information can help you narrow down your topic and find key search terms.

3). Consider strategies for how to go about researching your topic. What information are you looking for exactly and in what types of sources might you find it? Are these sources appropriate for a college-level research assignment?

4). Turn your topic into a question (or questions). “How does the film the Matrix explore philosophical notions of reality and truth?”

5). Identify keywords, concepts, and synonyms related to your topic. You can use these terms as keywords when you begin searching for materials.

Q. What is your research question(s)?

Q. What are some keywords you can use as search terms?

Ex: “The Matrix” | AND | “films” or “motion pictures” | AND | “philosophy” or “reality”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>AND/OR</th>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>AND/OR</th>
<th>Keyword</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find It!

Begin your research at the MVCC Library to find dependable, quality resources! Visit the library homepage at: http://lib.morainevalley.edu. If you need help, ASK A LIBRARIAN!

Library Catalog

Check the catalog to find books, videos, and more! Access it via the Library Homepage >> Research Tools >> Search Library Catalog. In the catalog, use tags, subject headings, limiters, and sorters to refine your search.
Databases
Access the library's databases for articles and other sources of information. You can find a database by name or by the subject matter you are studying. Multiple subject, hot topic/current issue databases may be the most helpful for your project. Library Homepage >> Research Tools >> Select Databases by Name OR by Subject

Q. What are some databases you can use for this research assignment?

1).
2).
3).
4).

Search Tips:
• Remember to look at subject terms or even search by them when necessary
• Broaden (generalize) or narrow (be more specific) the scope of your topic if needed when searching
• Use the advanced search feature to use Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to expand or narrow your search
• Use limiters to refine your search
• Remember to cite your sources! Some databases will create the citation for you—look for that feature.

The Open Web
Remember, unlike the library subscription databases the Web is not a fully-trustworthy, well-organized, stable, or easily searchable space. Nevertheless, if you are careful, you can find information that may be useful.

• To search the Web, we use something called a search engine, like Google, Yahoo, or Dogpile.
• Have a search strategy in place. And remember you may need to change your strategy to get better results. Be flexible!
• Try looking at websites that you suspect may have the info you need. For example, has your topic been in the news lately? Try the New York Times. Or if your topic is pollution, try an agency like the EPA.
• Conduct a Web search using an advanced search feature. See Google’s Advanced Search. Remember to check the search engine’s “Search Tips,” “Help,” or the like to maximize your search potential.
• Execute the same search in multiple search engines and see if your results vary.
• Be specific. Try to imagine what terms the author would use when writing any given topic and plug those in as search terms.

Consider This!

Take the time to evaluate your sources! The sources that you use reveal the quality and substance of your research. Choose sources worthy of your paper.

Source Evaluation Criteria

• **Accuracy**—Is the information reliable? Can you validate the info in other sources? Are there errors, omissions, or contradictions?

• **Authority/Credibility**—How do you know the author is qualified to write about the subject? Is he/she a scholar, journalist, industry professional, etc? What else has author written? What sources does author cite? How is the information created (hint: publishing process)?

• **Objectivity/Point of View**—Is the information biased? What is the point of view? If your source is subjective or promotes one agenda/opinion over others, be sure to balance it with other sources.

• **Relevance**—What is the information about? What topics are mentioned? Does it fill your information need and how so? Is the information substantial, lengthy, in-depth or just superficial? Is this appropriate for college-level research?
• **Currency**—Is the information still relevant? Could the information be considered outdated?

• **Audience**—Who is the intended audience?

### Special Considerations for Web Resources

• **Look at the website domain name in the URL (web address)**
  Look for clues about authorship and purpose of the website. (For example, the Moraine Valley website URL is: [www.morainevalley.edu](http://www.morainevalley.edu). The domain is ".edu." **Remember, these are guidelines. Be careful—nothing is absolute!**
  - .edu is used by educational institutions
  - .gov is used by the government
  - .com is used by commercial enterprises
  - .org is used by various types of organizations
  - .net is used by internet service providers for personal homepages

• When trying to determine the authority of a resource, if an author’s name and qualifications are not listed, **check the webpage for an "About" or "Contact" link** to see if that information is provided elsewhere. Furthermore, you can cross check your source’s qualifications by doing an additional search on the individual or organization.

• **Locate the source’s publication date.** Dates may not always be indicated on web pages, so it may be difficult to determine whether or not the information is timely. For some disciplines, like law or medicine, publication dates must be current to be reliable. For other disciplines, like history or literature, it may not be as much of an issue. Use your best judgment based on the subject matter or consult a librarian if you have any questions.

• Generally speaking, you will want to **avoid using/citing Wikipedia as a source.** Not every entry is written by a subject expert and information may not always be accurate or stable.

• Consider a site’s dependability—will that webpage be there tomorrow or a few weeks from now when you try to access it again?

### Cite Your Sources

Remember to use information **legally and ethically!** Below are some tools that can help you avoid plagiarism and cite your sources using the MLA manual of style.

#### Avoiding Plagiarism

• DePauw University Academic Resource Center: [http://www.depauw.edu/admin/arc/W-center/plag.asp](http://www.depauw.edu/admin/arc/W-center/plag.asp)

• Purdue OWL: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/930/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/930/01/)

#### MLA Style Guides

• MLA Formatting & Style Guide: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/)


#### Citation Generators

• Source Aid: [http://www.sourceaid.com/](http://www.sourceaid.com/)

• Easy Bib: [http://www.easybib.com/](http://www.easybib.com/)