

LIBRARIES

Doing a research paper may seem like an overwhelming task, but it doesn't have to be. Just remember "Murphy's Law as Applied to Libraries":

A poorly planned research project will take three times longer to do than you imagine it will. A carefully planned project will take only twice as long.

SELECTING A TOPIC, or "All topics are equal, but some are more equal than others"

How you select your topic will depend on the scope of your paper and what your instructor has specified. Here are some general guidelines for selecting a topic:

- ◆ If at all possible, pick a subject you really care about. Since you will be spending a considerable amount of time researching your topic, you will want it to be something that holds your interest.
- ◆ Make sure that your topic isn't too narrow or too vague. For instance, you may be interested in paper airplanes, but there probably isn't a lot of material written about them. On the other hand, if you were interested in Japan, you would have to narrow your topic. Here are some suggestions for doing so:
 - ◆ Consult the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* books (located on tables in the Reference area). The subheadings for your topic may give you an idea.
 - ◆ Look through your syllabus or textbook for ideas.
 - ◆ Limit your topic by geography and/or time period. (For example, "American Women Writers in the 19th Century" is better than "Women Writers.")
 - ◆ Start with a general encyclopedia. Encyclopedias tend to discuss different aspects of a subject.
 - ◆ Ask the Reference librarian to suggest some handbooks, journals or guides that might cover your topic.
 - ◆ If you are still having trouble selecting a topic, consult your instructor. S/he may be able to help you.
- ◆ **Current Events.** While current events are certainly interesting, there tends to be a time lag between events and scholarly documentation of them. Often newspapers and news magazines may be your only sources. For this reason, you may wish to avoid current events as topics unless you are dealing with a very short paper (1-2 pages). If you do decide to write about a current event you should take a look at the library guide *Current Issues -- Hot Topics*.
- ◆ **Popular Topics.** Try to be original and creative. If you choose a "hot" topic you may find that much of the material has been checked out. You also run the risk of boring your instructor.

STARTING YOUR RESEARCH, or "One small step for man . . ."

There is a lot of material available and many different ways of accessing it. Where you start depends on the length and depth of your paper. For longer papers, you will want to start with books and supplement with a variety of other sources, such as journal articles and government documents. For shorter papers, you may need only books

or journal articles. Depth of coverage and currency of information are two important points to remember. Journal articles tend to be more current, but books usually offer much more information. Where you go to access information on your topic depends on the sort of material you are looking for: books, journal articles, government documents, newspapers, statistics, etc.

Books: Using Bearcat...

- ◆ To find books available on campus you need to use **BearCat**, the online catalog. To access **BearCat**, go to the Libraries' homepage at <http://library.lib.binghamton.edu> and click on **BearCat**. You can search by author, title, subject, keyword, as well as many other options. The screen record will give you publishing information about the books and will tell you if they have been checked out or placed on Reserve. For more detailed instructions on how to use **BearCat**, see the handouts in the terminal area, or try the **Help** button. If we don't seem to have any books on your topic, talk to a Reference librarian. She or he may be able to offer some suggestions.
- ◆ Books in the Main library (with the exception of Reference books) are located on the third and fourth floors. You can discover the location of a book by looking at the call number. There are signs in the Reference area and next to the elevators describing what call numbers are on each floor.

For more detailed information see the library guide ***Finding Books in the Libraries***.

Articles, or Making Sense of the Internet...

When using any of these article indexes, pay close attention to the dates covered. For instance, many databases only go back to the early 1980s; you won't find any articles written on the Vietnam War as it was happening.

Internet

There are many article databases available on the Internet. They can be accessed via the Libraries' homepage at <http://library.lib.binghamton.edu>. Databases available via the homepage are divided as follows:

FULL-TEXT RESOURCES Databases under this heading are full-text. They include:

OneFile (including, *Expanded Academic ASAP* (1980 -) Covers general sciences, humanities, social sciences, history, psychology, law, religion, etc.

LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe Covers newspapers (U.S. and international), transcripts, company financial information, legal information and more.

ProQuest is divided into four parts: **ABI/INFORM Global** (1971 -) (business journals and magazines), **PA Research II** (1971 -) (magazines and journals), **American Medical Association** (1986 -) (medical journals) and **ProQuest Newspapers** (1974 -) (major U.S. newspapers).

Health Reference Center—Academic (1990-) Covers health information on nursing, allied health and consumer health research.

Dialog@Carl Contains over 100 (primarily) full-text databases in many subject areas.

DATABASES & INDEXES Databases under this heading are not full text, but may contain abstracts. They include:

FirstSearch consists of over 60 databases covering many different disciplines.

WebSPIRS consists of seven databases in the areas of biology, nursing, geology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and social work.

PRINT INDEXES

If you aren't having any luck with the Internet databases, you may want to try one of these indexes. If you are unsure about which index would be right for your topic, ask at the Reference desk, or pick up the library guide ***Subject Periodical Indexes and Abstracts***.

CD-ROMs

If you are unsure whether we have a CD-ROM that covers your subject, ask at the Reference Desk or look at the library guide ***CD-ROM Databases: Bibliographic & Full-Text***.

After you have found the articles you need, check **BearCat**. It will tell you if we own a title, what years we

have, and if it is kept on microfilm. Journals in the Main Library are located in two places. Current journals (anything published in the past 3 to 6 months or so) are on the second floor in the Current Periodicals area. Journals are arranged in three "displays" or sections: the General Display, the Math/Technical Display, and the Hebrew/Arabic Display.

Older journals can be found on the third floor, either in the microfilm area or the bound periodical area. Bound periodicals are arranged alphabetically by title. Pre-1980 journal volumes have been moved to storage. You can page these volumes.

Internet documents, or "To Use, or Not to Use"

The Internet provides access to millions of pages of information. However, since the development of the Internet, many professors have complained about the low quality of the citations in their students' papers. Think carefully about the following issues before citing an Internet document. When deciding whether to use an Internet document, consider the following points: Who wrote the page? Are they an authoritative source? Is it a corporation, an organization, an individual? Is there a point of view, or bias that you should take into account? How often is the page updated? Remember that anyone can put a page up on the WWW, and unlike book publishing, there is no screening process by an editor. To get a good introduction to web documents on a subject, go to the Libraries' homepage and click on **Subject Guides**. If you wish to do your own Internet search, click on **Search Engines and Directories**.

Government Documents, or "How to get help from "Big Brother. . ."

The United States government publishes information on many subjects and is a great source for statistical and social data. Government Documents are included within **BearCat**, the Libraries' catalog. Many government documents are now available on the Internet. Go to the Libraries' home page, click on the **Virtual Reference Desk**, then on **Government Information**.

When using **BearCat**, realize that the call numbers for Government Documents are different than the call numbers for books. The Government Documents Collection is located on the first floor of the Main Library. For more information on how to search for government documents, look at the library guide **United States Government Documents**.

Newspapers: not just for lining the hamster cage

The Main Library has the full-text databases **LEXIS/NEXIS** and **ProQuest**, as well as several print indexes that cover specific newspapers. The index to the local paper, the **Press & Sun Bulletin** can be found on the site for the Broome County Public Library. Ask a librarian for help in finding this. Current newspapers are kept in the Newspaper room on the second floor. Older newspapers (3 months or older) are microfilmed and are kept in the microfilm area on the third floor.

Statistics, or How to say anything you want with numbers

Statistics can be found in a number of places including reference books, government documents and periodicals. Before attempting to look for statistics, drop by the Reference desk for assistance.

NOTES: end, foot, and otherwise.

Information needed for footnotes and bibliographies includes the following:

- a) the title of the article or the chapter of the book
- b) author(s)
- c) the title of the periodical or book
- d) page numbers
- e) date of publication, publisher and city

Your instructor may require you to write your paper using a particular stylebook for the footnotes or bibliography. Look for the one-page **Guide to Style Manuals**. Electronic documents are often not mentioned in style manuals. For examples of electronic, (i.e. CD-ROM or Internet) citations, look at the **Citing Internet and Electronic Resources** link listed under the **Virtual Reference Desk** on the Libraries' homepage or consult the library print

guide *Citing Internet and Other Electronic Resources*.

If you have any questions about the actual process of writing a paper, contact the Writing Center, located in LN 1209. The telephone number is 777-6725.

IF WE DON'T OWN THE MATERIALS YOU NEED

If we don't own the journals or books that you need, they can be obtained through Interlibrary Loan.

Before trying Interlibrary Loan for a journal article, try using the **Journal List by Title** option on the **Full-Text Resources** page. Your article may be available in a full-text database. It takes around 2-4 weeks to get materials through Interlibrary Loan -- another reason to start your research as early as possible.

This university belongs to a fast-order ILL service called SUNY-Express. This is a network of SUNY libraries that give your ILL request priority treatment. You are favored over non-SUNY express requesters of the same articles and books, and your order is processed first. For that reason, try to order your ILL materials from SUNY libraries when possible.

ILL forms are available at the Reference Desk, or you can go straight to the ILL office, located in the Main Library around the corner from the Circulation desk.