

# How to Start Your Research

---

*"We are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants."*

*--Bernard of Chartres*

The point of research and proper citation is to credit the giants whose ideas affect your intellectual development. Strive for a balance between recognizing others' ideas and using them as a springboard for your own.

## **When you have completed your research, your notes should form a clear "road map" of your research.**

- ➔ Your road map will include: which ideas or words belong to someone else; where you found the material; and what sparked your own ideas.

## **How do I get started?**

- ➔ Start by writing down as many questions as you can think of about the topic. Try to have at least a dozen questions for a four to six page paper. (Remember, it's better to have too much material than too little!)
- ➔ Then, organize those questions into categories. Your categories may be, "Describe the problem," "Factors and Causes of the Problem," and "Solutions for the Problem." Your categories may be, "Beginning," "Middle," and "End." Think of the categories that best fit your topic.
- ➔ You may now begin to research the answers to these questions. Once you have answers, you can begin to formulate a thesis statement.
- ➔ Don't write your thesis statement until after you complete your research! You want to give time for these ideas to form in your mind, before forcing an artificial structure on them.

## **Do I have to read the entire book or article to find a good source?**

- ➔ You can scan a book or article quickly to determine if it will be useful to your paper.
- ➔ Try the following exercise in scanning an article, essay, or chapter in a book to determine if it is a good source for your paper:
  - Read the title, the first, and the last paragraphs to find the argument, or main point of the article. If this is a scientific paper, you may also read the abstract.
  - Identify the main point, or argument, of the article.
    - Does this topic have to do with your own?
    - Can you use the assertions, ideas, or facts in this paper to support your own argument?
  - If this article is useful to you, then you can pull parts, or even quotations from it.
    - Be sure to understand the full argument of the paper before you begin to quote from it!

### **Do I have to agree with every source I use in my paper?**

- ➔ You can include quotations that contradict your own point! Recognizing other points of view will make your paper stronger. Just remember that after you acknowledge other points of view, you must then respond to them, explaining their weaknesses and why you are sticking to your perspective.

### **How can I take good notes?**

- ➔ Save each article that you cite. You may print out the articles, or save them to your flash drive.
- ➔ Take lots of notes as you read in the library. Do not wait until you finish reading to begin taking notes: write as you read!
- ➔ As you take notes, you must:
  1. Note where you found each new piece of information. (You should be able to locate the exact page in a book, webpage, or even paragraph number to find the information again.)
  2. Write the new information or ideas that you've learned in your research.
  3. Clearly separate your ideas from someone else's.