Information Literacy 1
The Research Paper: Getting Started

1. **Choose a topic or identify your question**
   - Be as specific as possible.
   - Have your goal in mind. Are you writing a research paper, an essay, a speech, etc.?
   - How much information do you need? Do you need a specific number of sources? You may need more sources for a lengthy paper.
   - What type of information do you need to accomplish your goal? Do you need a variety of sources? Do you need to use books, magazines, journals, online sources, etc.?

2. **Select a topic by using information sources**
   - *CQ Researcher*, a weekly publication covering current and controversial topics. Available electronically from the library’s webpage under “Research Resources.”
   - *ProQuest* National Newspapers provides online access to current, full text newspaper articles. Available electronically from the library’s webpage under “Research Resources.”
   - *Credo Reference* searches encyclopedias and dictionaries to provide overviews of a variety of topics. Available electronically from the library’s webpage under “Research Resources.”
   - Ask a librarian: reference@hartnell.edu or call 759-6078

3. **Narrow or develop a topic**
   - Read about your topic. Find background information from an encyclopedia, textbook or other general source. If your topic is current or new, you may need to use a periodical or newspaper article available in the library’s database.
   - Write down keywords, important names, dates, ideas and variant spellings and synonyms.
     - Using “bilingual education” as an example:
       - List synonyms and related words about the subject such as education, language instruction, bilingualism, limited English speaking, second language, non-English speaking, immersion programs, etc.
       - List the people involved such as students, teachers, parents, school administrators, politicians, etc.
       - List the time period covering your topic such as 1960’s to present
       - List any other pertinent information such as politics, class size, economy, fiscal impact, student success, etc.
       - List words that describe the geographical and/or political area such as United States, California, Texas, etc.

4. **Create a rough outline**
   - Organize your ideas.
   - Include an Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. Your instructor may prefer a slightly different organization.
5. Create a preliminary bibliography
   • This is an alphabetical list of sources on your topic.
   • As you gather information on your topic, write each source in a separate document in the proper bibliographic format
   • See our handouts for MLA and APA citation styles from the guides on the library webpage under “How to Cite Information”.

6. Select the appropriate sources of information.
   • Critically examine the information and sources.
   • Choose the best information.
   • Take notes using the sources that give your paper depth.
   • Write down the page number and source for each note.

7. Make this information part of your own understanding.
   • Arrange your notes. Use the outline from step 4 as your guide.
   • Revise your outline and bibliography as you add new sources.
   • Integrate material from sources into your own writing by summarizing, paraphrasing, and/or quoting.
   • Draw from your own experience and knowledge.

8. Write a rough draft. Include the information from your outline. Check for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Does it read logically and fluidly?

   • Include your list of works cited or references using the bibliographic format required by your instructor.
   • Use Times New Roman size 12 font for your paper with 1” margins

Web Sites:
Writing a Research Paper from the Online Writing Center at Purdue: 
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/01/
Writers Workshop: Writer Resources from the Center for Writing Studies at University of Illinois
   • APA: http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/citation/apa/
   • MLA: http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/citation/mla/

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