

## Research a contemporary social issue, controversy, or concern

You cannot even attempt to write a well-crafted research paper until you undergo the process of gathering information known as **research**. This stage has five steps.

### STEP ONE: IDENTIFY YOUR TOPIC.

**State your topic idea as a question.** For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by high school students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of high school students?"

**Identify the main concepts or keywords** in your question. In this case they are alcoholic beverages, health, and high school students.

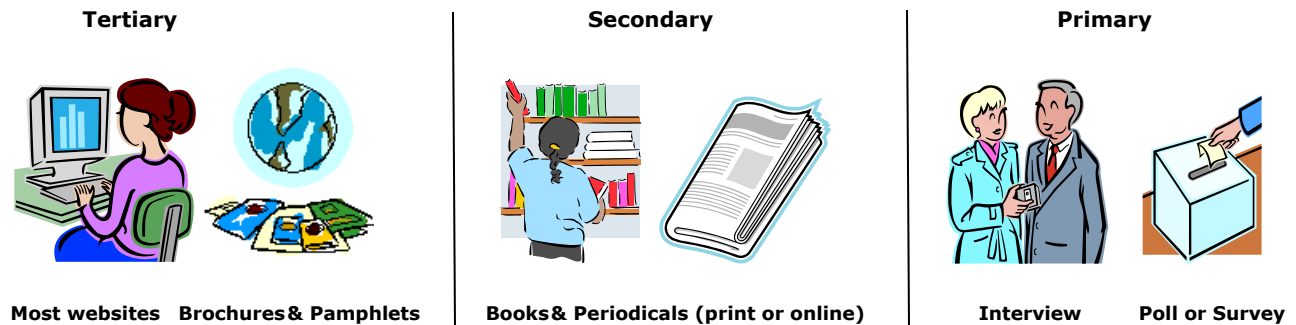
### STEP TWO: TEST YOUR TOPIC.

**Test the main concepts or keywords** in your topic **by looking them up** in the appropriate background sources or **by using them as search terms** in search engines and in periodical indexes.

- If you are finding too much information and too many sources, narrow your topic by using the **and** operator: beer **and** health **and** high school students, for example.
- Finding too little information may indicate that you need to broaden your topic. For example, look for information on students, rather than just high school students. Link synonymous search terms with or: alcoholic beverages or beer or wine or liquor. Using truncation with search terms also broadens the search and increases the number of items you find.
- Once you have identified the main topic and keywords for your research, find one or more sources of background information to read. These sources will help you understand the broader context of your research and tell you in general terms what is known about your topic. The most common background sources are **encyclopedias and dictionaries** from the print and online reference collection. **See page 3 for links to our library's resources with passwords.**
- Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines, etc.) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. The sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research.
- Though **Wikipedia.org is not a valid resource**, it is a good starting point. Be careful, though; a good article will have citations of many and various sources. The links or full sources are listed at the bottom of the page, with any other relevant external links.

**STEP THREE: RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC.**

Remember the requirement that you gather information from a variety of sources:



- You must have at least two sources from periodicals (magazines, newspapers, professional journals, etc.). These are known as secondary sources. There is a wealth of information available from our school's library; go to: <https://www.redhookcentralschools.org/Page/2700> and click on "Social Issues" under O'Connor.
- You must have at least one primary source. You can choose any or even all of the following types of primary sources:
  - You can gather factual data in the form of numbers: a poll or survey. You will also need to synthesize it (put it into the form of a visual such as a graph, chart, etc.). We will be spending one class period consulting online resources for creating charts and graphs.
  - You can gather information from an interview. You may interview one expert on the topic, or at least two non-experts who are directly impacted by or involved with your issue. The interview can be face-to-face, or via telephone or internet chat. Regardless of the means, the entire interview must be transcribed. You must create and submit a list of talking points prior to the interview, and a copy of the transcript must be submitted as well. If you interview via telephone and wish to record the interview, you must first obtain permission from the interviewee.
  - You may gather data from personal observation. Keep notes on events, trends, etc. Feel free to capture photos, and other recordings (must be in addition to other observational data) to embed later in your paper!
- No more than ¼ of your total research may be tertiary in nature. Most internet sources are known as tertiary (3<sup>rd</sup> party) sources; however, online newspapers and e-text versions of certain publications may be considered secondary sources. You can try the following online databases from our library or at home:

The following on Primary research is excerpted from:

Purdue Online Writing Lab, Purdue University. 6 Feb. 2010. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>>

**Primary research** is any type of research that you go out and collect yourself. Examples include surveys, interviews, observations, and ethnographic research. A good researcher knows how to use both primary and secondary sources in her writing and to integrate them in a cohesive fashion.

Conducting primary research is a useful skill to acquire as it can greatly supplement your research in secondary sources, such as journals, magazines, or books. You can also use it as the focus of your writing project. Primary research is an excellent skill to learn as it can be useful in a variety of settings including business, personal, and academic.

### **But I'm not an expert!**

With some careful planning, primary research can be done by anyone, even students new to writing at the university level. The information provided in this handout will help you to get started.

### **What types of projects or activities benefit from primary research?**

When you are working on a local problem that may not have been addressed before and little research is there to back it up.

### **What types of primary research can be done?**

Many types of primary research exist. This guide is designed to provide you with an overview of primary research that is often done in writing classes.

**Interviews:** Interviews are one-on-one or small group question and answer sessions. Interviews will provide a lot of information from a small number of people and are useful when you want to get an expert or knowledgeable opinion on a subject.

**Surveys:** Surveys are a form of questioning that is more rigid than interviews and that involve larger groups of people. Surveys will provide a limited amount of information from a large group of people and are useful when you want to learn what a larger population thinks.

**Observations:** Observations involve taking organized notes about occurrences in the world. Observations provide you insight about specific people, events, or locales and are useful when you want to learn more about an event without the biased viewpoint of an interview.

**Analysis:** Analysis involves collecting data and organizing it in some fashion based on criteria you develop. They are useful when you want to find some trend or pattern. A type of analysis would be to record commercials on three major television networks and analyze gender roles.

**Where do I start?** Consider the following questions when thinking about conducting primary research:

- What do I want to discover?
- How do I plan on discovering it? (This is called your research methods or methodology)
- Who am I going to talk to/observe/survey? (your "subjects" or "participants")
- How am I going to be able gain access to these groups or individuals?
- What are my biases about this topic?
- How can I make sure my biases are not reflected in my research methods?
- What do I expect to discover?

## Ethical Considerations in Primary Research

Primary research is conducted all of the time--journalists use it as their primary means of reporting news and events; national polls and surveys discover what the population thinks about a particular political figure or proposal; and companies collect data on their consumer base and market trends. When conducting research in an academic or professional setting, you need to be aware of the ethics behind your research activity.

Here are some specific points to consider:

- You should have the permission of the people who you will be studying to conduct research involving them.
- Not all types of research require permission—for example, if you are interested in analyzing something that is available publicly (such as in the case of commercials, public message boards, etc) you do not necessarily need the permission of the authors.
- You don't want to do anything that would cause physical or emotional harm to your subjects. This could be something as simple as being careful how you word sensitive or difficult questions during your interviews.
- Objectivity vs. subjectivity in your research is another important consideration. Be sure your own personal biases and opinions do not get in the way of your research and that you give both sides fair consideration.
- Many types of research, such as surveys or observations, should be conducted under the assumption that you will keep your findings anonymous. Many interviews, however, are not done under the condition of anonymity. You should let your subjects know whether your research results will be anonymous or not.
- When you are doing research, be sure you are not taking advantage of easy-to-access groups of people (such as children at a daycare) simply because they are easy to access. You should choose your subjects based on what would most benefit your research.
- Some types of research done in a university setting require Institutional Board Approval. This means that your research has to be approved by an ethics review committee to make sure you are not violating any of the above considerations.
- When reporting your results be sure that you accurately represent what you observed or what you were told. Do not take interview responses out of context and do not discuss small parts of observations without putting them into the appropriate context.

## Common Pitfalls of Primary Research

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • <b>Over-generalizing your results</b>       | • <b>Not considering other related factors</b> |
| • <b>Biased methodology</b>                   | • <b>Being able to know what data is valid</b> |
| • <b>Correlation does not imply causation</b> | • <b>Reported behavior vs. actual behavior</b> |

**Interviewing** is a great way to learn detailed information from a single individual or small number of individuals. It is very useful when you want to gain expert opinions on the subject or talk to someone knowledgeable about a topic.

### Types of Interviewing

Several different types of interviews exist. You should choose one based on what kind of technology you have available to you, the availability of the individual you are interviewing, and how comfortable you feel talking to people. Acceptable interview methods are:

- ✓ **Face to Face Interviews**
- ✓ **Phone Interviews**
- ✓ **Email Interviews**
- ✓ **Chat/Messaging Interviews**

### Setting up an interview

When setting up an interview, be sure to be courteous and professional. Explain to the person being interviewed who you are, what you want to talk them about, and what project you are working on. Don't be discouraged if not everyone you contact is willing to be interviewed.

### When conducting interviews...

- **Do** be careful of the types of questions you ask. See the "Creating good survey and interview questions" section for more information.
- **Do** start the interview with some small talk to give both yourself and the person you are interviewing a chance to get comfortable.
- **Do** bring redundant recording equipment in case something happens to one of your recording devices.
- **Do** pay attention to what is being said during the interview and follow up responses that sound interesting.
- **Do** come to the interview prepared. You should learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview before the interview takes place so that you can tailor your questions to them.
- **Don't** pester or push the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, you should respect that desire.
- **Don't** stick to your questions rigidly. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, feel free to ask additional questions about it.
- **Don't** allow the person you are interviewing to continually get off topic. If the conversation drifts, ask follow-up questions to redirect the conversation to the subject at hand.

**Surveying** is a great way to discover what a large amount of people think about a particular issue or how a group of people report their behavior. Surveys can be done on a large range of topics and can be conducted relatively easily. Some things to consider when conducting surveys are:

- ✓ **Who are you planning on surveying?**
- ✓ **How many people are you going to survey?**
- ✓ **How are you going to survey people?**
- ✓ **How long is your survey going to be?**
- ✓ **What type of questions are you going to ask?**

**When creating survey questions you want to avoid:**

### **Biased questions**

Biased questions are questions that encourage your participants to respond to the question in a certain way. They may contain biased terminology or are worded in a biased way.

**Biased question:** Don't you agree that campus parking is a problem?

**Revised question:** Is parking on campus a problem?

### **Questions that assume what they ask**

These questions are a type of biased question and lead your participants to agree or respond in a certain way.

**Biased question:** There are many people who believe that campus parking is a problem. Are you one of them?

**Revised question:** Do you agree or disagree that campus parking is a problem?

### **Double-barreled questions**

A double-barreled question is a one that has more than one question embedded within it. Participants may answer one but not both, or may disagree with part or all of the question.

**Double-barreled question:** Do you agree that campus parking is a problem and that the administration should be working diligently on a solution?

**Revised question:** Is campus parking a problem? (If the participant responds yes): Should the administration be responsible for solving this problem?

### **Confusing or wordy questions**

Make sure your questions are not confusing or wordy. Confusing questions will only lead to confused participants, which leads to unreliable answers.

### **Questions that do not relate to what you want to learn**

Be sure that your questions directly relate to what it is you are studying. A good way to do this is to ask someone else to read your questions or even test your survey out on a few people and see if the responses fit what you are looking for.

**!!!!!!!Use of these passwords is intended for the Red Hook High School Community!!!!!!!**

Resource type	URL	User ID/ Login	Password
Current issues	<a href="http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher">http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher</a>	redhook	redhook
General Search	<a href="http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/nysl_se_rhhs">http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/nysl_se_rhhs</a>		empirelink
Encyclopedia	<a href="http://go.grolier.com">http://go.grolier.com</a> (out of school)	rhshsdb	grolier
Newspapers	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com">http://www.nytimes.com</a>	redhookhslib	raiders
Newspapers	<a href="http://infoweb.newsbank.com">http://infoweb.newsbank.com</a>	redhook	redhook
Legal Issues	<a href="http://congressionaldigest.com/">http://congressionaldigest.com/</a>	Redhook	Raiders
Science	<a href="http://www.info.sciencedirect.com">http://www.info.sciencedirect.com</a>	redhookhs	trewq123
Science	<a href="http://online.salempress.com/home.do">http://online.salempress.com/home.do</a>		rhraiders
General	<a href="http://www.worldbookonline.com">http://www.worldbookonline.com</a>	redhook	redhook
General	<a href="http://portal.bigchalk.com/portalweb/home.do">http://portal.bigchalk.com/portalweb/home.do</a>	67-2376	bigchalk

**!!!!!!!Use of these passwords is intended for the Red Hook High School Community!!!!!!!**

#### **STEP FOUR: CITE WHAT YOU FIND**

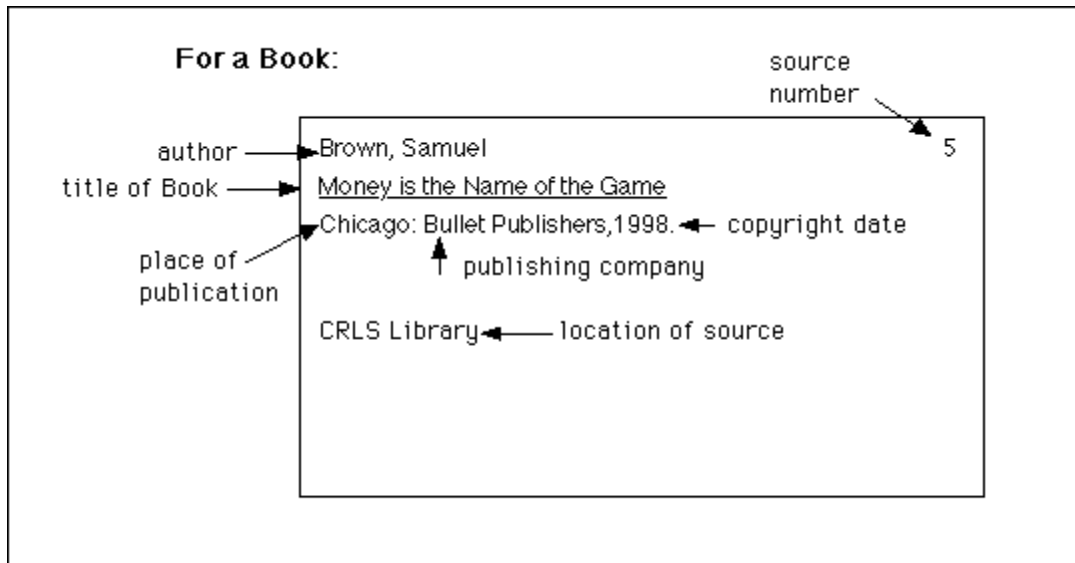
**Source cards** are index cards (you can also use notebook pages, a word processing document or database document) on which you put all of the information you will need *about* all the sources you use.

Use index cards to make your source cards, or keep a few notebook pages reserved for this information, or make a word processing or database file for them. If you use index cards, use only one card per source.

Code each source its own number, starting with the number 1. You will later link your notes to these code numbers.

Sample Source Cards:

There are many, many different types of sources: books, websites, videos, TV shows, people, to name a few. On the next page is an example of a source card.



You will end up with one source card per each source. Remember that every source must have a source card associated with it (even interviews and polls conducted).

**Note Cards.** It is useful to take notes on index cards because it gives you the flexibility to change the order of your notes and group them together easily. You can buy a few packages of 3x5 or 5x7 index cards at most drugstores or stationery stores.

1. Include the source's number (see source card directions) on the card
2. Write the subtopic heading of the note at the top of each note card.
2. Write only one main point on a note card
3. Only write information directly related to your thesis.
4. Write only essential words, abbreviate when possible.
5. Be accurate: double check direct quotes and statistics.
6. Identify direct quotes with quotation marks and the person's name.
7. Bracket your own words [ ] when you add them into a quote.
8. Use ellipsis points (...) where you leave out non-essential words from a quote.
9. Distinguish between 'fact' and 'opinion'.
11. Write the page number of the source after the note.
12. Use the word 'over' to indicate information on the back of the card.

7

*Madhoff Scandal*

*Madoff gave [DiPascali]*  
*\$800,000 from scam proceeds*  
*to finance construction of a*  
*more than \$2 million New*  
*Jersey home ... [and] a 61-foot*  
*sport fisherman yacht* p.A4

You will have several note cards for each source you've consulted.

Once you've completed your research, it's time to begin organizing your note cards in a logical order, with an eye toward creating the final product ( the actual paper). Group together all the cards that have the same topic. When you finish, you should have your cards in piles, one topic per pile. You can have any number of piles and any number of cards in each pile. The length and detail of your paper will determine how many piles and cards you have.

Once you have separated your cards into piles, each topic pile should become a body paragraph in your paper. That is the key to this system. If every topic directly supports your thesis statement, then each topic pile should become a supporting idea, body paragraph, or part of a paragraph in your paper.



Before you actually begin writing, you will make an outline of the order you want to present these topics in your paper. The process of outlining, drafting, and correctly formatting the final paper will be discussed in the coming weeks.

### STEP FIVE: ORGANIZE YOUR SOURCES ON A WORKS CITED PAGE

The last step of this stage of the project is to compile a works cited page. Even though this page is the last page of your research paper, I want to see that you have correctly taken note of your sources, have an appropriate number and variety of sources, and have documented correctly the necessary information with regard to your sources. The next two pages of this handout will show you the correct format for the Works Cited page, as well as give you an idea of the necessary information for each source.

- The Works Cited page follows the last page of your paper and is numbered sequentially, using the proper header format.
- The title of your Works Cited page will appear 1" from the top margin; centered; with NO bold, all-caps, italics, underlining, or quotation marks.
- Your first entry, alphabetized by author's last name, or first major word of the title when author is unknown, will begin at the left margin, two lines below your page title.

Here's a sample top 1/2 of a Works Cited page by someone with the last name of Jones:

<p style="text-align: right;">Jones 6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Edwards, Gail, and Erica Smith. <u>Work in the 90s</u>. New York: McMillan, 1997.</p> <p>Ford, Fiona. "Living with ADD." <u>Medicine News</u> Sept. 1997: 89-96.</p> <p>Hamilton, Edith, ed. <u>Writing to Be Read</u>. London: McQuade Co., 1986.</p> <p>Jones, Jessica. <u>The Elements of Expression</u>. Chicago: Harcourt, 1997.</p> <p><u>Symbolism in The Scarlet Letter</u>. Sept. 1997. Date visited: 6 Sept. 1997.</p> <p>&lt;<a href="http://www.Hawthorne.webcom.com/index.html">http://www.Hawthorne.webcom.com/index.html</a>&gt;.</p> <p>Winthrop, Josh. "Princess Di Dead at 36." <u>New York Times</u> 1 Sept. 1997: A1.</p>	<p>Notice the student's last name is 1/2" from the top; this is the sixth page of the paper. Works Cited appears centered 1" from top.</p> <p>All text is double spaced; 2<sup>nd</sup> line of an entry is indented 5 spaces.</p> <p>Find names of authors of web pages whenever possible. If not, alphabetize according to page name.</p> <p>URLs are contained in "&lt;" and "&gt;" ; try to keep the URL on one line.</p>
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English 10  
Research in Contemporary Social Issue

**Make sure as you conduct your research that you copy down the relevant information about each source:**

**Book with One Author:**

Jones, Jessica. The Elements of Expression, Chicago, Harcourt, 1997.

**Book with Two Authors:**

Edwards, Gail and Erica Smith. Work in the 90s. New York, McMillan, 1997.

**Daily Newspaper:**

Winthrop, Josh. "Princess Di Dead at 36." New York Times page A1, September 1, 1997.

**Monthly Journal:**

Ford, Fiona. "Living with ADD." Medicine News September 1997, pp.89-96.

**Personal Interview:**

McKee, Kelly, interviewed on September 3, 1997.

**A web site:**

Felluga, Dino. Undergraduate Guide to Literary Theory. 17 Dec. 1999.

Purdue University. Date visited: 15 Nov. 2000

<<http://omni.cc.purdue.edu/%7Efelluga/theory2.html>>.

**An article on a web site:**

Poland, Dave. "The Hot Button." Roughcut. 26 Oct. 1998. Turner Network Television.

Date visited: 28 Oct. 1998 <<http://www.roughcut.com>>.

**Anthology or collection:**

Peterson, Nancy J., ed. Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

**A part of a book (such as an essay or introduction in a collection):**

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." A Tutor's Guide: Helping

Writers One to One. Ed. Ben Rafoth. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. 24-34.

**Essay in a journal:**

Duvall, John N. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in

DeLillo's *White Noise*." Arizona Quarterly 50.3 (1994): 127-53.

This is an incomplete list; if you feel that your reference does not fit one of these categories, a good place to go for more information on citing sources is

"Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Format." Purdue Online Writing Lab. 2003.

Purdue University. 6 Feb. 2003 <[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_mla.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html)>

Incidentally, the preceding entry is the correct way to cite a **website with an unknown author**.