Pick a Topic

Step 1: Brainstorm (think) of a topic.

- What are you interested in?
- Does your topic fit the assignment?
- Do you know something about the topic already? Can you learn about it easily?
- Our Research Topic Ideas (http://libguides.umflint.edu/topics) guide can be a good place to look for ideas. Each yellow tab is a different list based on a large field of study.

Step 2: Read some basic information about your topic.

- Sometimes you will know about your topic, but finding a short summary of the topic may remind you of facts you forgot.
- Encyclopedias are good places to start. Credo Reference is an online collection of encyclopedias (http://libproxy.umflint.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com/); print encyclopedias are located behind the Reference Desk on the third floor of the library.
- Look out for important words or phrases related to your topic because these will come in handy later on.

"Pre-search"

Step 3: Focus your topic.

- Is my topic too broad (big)? The history of the United States is too big a topic to fit in a five page research paper, but the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War might work.
- Is my topic too narrow (small)? You might have trouble finding enough information on the effects of climate change in Genesee County, but the effects in Michigan or the Great Lakes might work.
- Put your topic in the form of a question. This will help you focus on the kind of information you want to collect. The question, "What causes air pollution?" is a very different question that "Does air pollution cause lung disease?"
Step 4: Make a list of keywords.

- What were the important words you found in the encyclopedia?
- Are there synonyms for those words? Heart disease is the same thing as cardiovascular disease.
- Are there broader (less specific) or narrower (more specific) words you could use? "Smog" is more specific than "air pollution." "Children" is less specific than "kindergarteners."
- Not every database or article uses the same words to describe the same topic, so look for suggested keywords during your search.

Research

Step 5: Use resources like Summon (http://libguides.umflint.edu/summon) or Mirlyn (http://libguides.umflint.edu/mirlyn) to search for the articles, books, and other sources of information you need.

- Use your list of keywords to search the library's databases. Remember to use Boolean Logic to make better searches.
- Use database limiters to shorten our list of results. Limiters like "Full Text," "Peer-Reviewed," and date ranges can be very helpful.
- You may start searching and not be able to find the type of information you need. You may have to broaden or narrow your topic or use different keywords in your search. You may have to do several searches to find what you are looking for.
- Remember to Ask a Librarian (http://libguides.umflint.edu/ask) if you have questions or trouble finding what you need!

Step 6: Keep track of any articles you find.

- Write down information about your sources as you find them. Include the article title, the author, and information about the journal like its title, year of publication, and volume/issue numbers.
- Most databases have ways to send a list of articles to your email.
- You can download or print articles as you find them.
- You can send an article's citation information to a citation tracking program like EasyBib (http://libguides.umflint.edu/easybib) or Refworks (http://libguides.umflint.edu/rwumflint)