

VALLEY COLLEGE

Resource Reference Sheet

Basic Steps in the Research Process

1. Select a topic that will enable you to collect enough secondary information to effectively research.
2. Focus on your topic and clearly state the purpose of your paper clear.
3. Gather information on your topic from multiple sources.
4. Organize your research and organize the primary section(s) of your paper.
5. Prepared the first draft of your paper accounting for the format and structure as directed by your instructor(s).
6. Proof, refine, and make the necessary adjustments to your paper and complete your final draft
7. Submit the paper as directed by your instructor(s) in your course room.

Throughout your tenure at Valley College as a student, you may find that you have assignments that require you to conduct additional research, write an essay, or prepare a research paper on a specific topic. Therefore, this Reference Sheet has been prepared to serve as a resource for you throughout these activities. This document discusses the basics on how to conduct research and further, offers a few Internet Sites that may be used along with the resources found in the campus Resource Center.

Valley College's Resource Center also has periodicals, newspapers, and books that can assist you in your quest to gain additional resource material. Check with your instructor about the rules for the Resource Center. In addition, Valley College also has an Internet Library called Gale. The link for this tool resides in your classroom and further, you should also contact your Instructor or your Student Success Coach (SSC) with any questions on Gale.

Selection of a Topic and the corresponding Resources:

- The textbooks offered in your courses offer you concepts, theories, and examples on topics that can lead to excellent research topics.
- Textbooks also possess bibliographies, which is a list of resources used by an author in preparing that a specific chapter. The bibliographies within your textbook can be a springboard to your research pool. Further, bibliographies can offer you specific titles of books or articles that you may want to research to find more details for your research paper.
- Finally, encyclopedias are also a good place to search for general topics. Just as textbooks provide concepts, theories, and examples, encyclopedias offer general discussions on a wide variety of topics and often have bibliographies at the end of the articles.

Select a topic where you have a natural interest:

- First and foremost, Valley College's goal is to ensure that you fully comprehend the core learning objectives of each and every class. As part of this process, you will be asked to complete various assignments.

- For subjects that involve research, we believe that you find the process both enjoyable and rewarding if you select research topics where you have a natural interest or further, represents a subject you wish to pursue as a professional in your field upon graduation.
- This approach makes it more enjoyable as you research your topic and further, prepare a paper, project, or analysis.

Scope of your Topic:

- Further, it is also recommended that you limit the scope of your paper to specific topic to make the purpose of your paper clear. You may want to consider stating your topic as a question.
- For example, if you are interested in finding out more about Sam Walton for your Customer Service class, you might ask the question, "What were Sam Walton's theories on Customer Service?"

Gathering information for your topic

- There is a litany of information in textbooks, newspapers, periodicals, and the internet. As a result, the research project can be frustrating if you select a topic that is too broad or not broad enough.
- Therefore, when initiating your research, it is recommended that you begin by **selecting key words from your topic to use in your search**. Key words are important words associated with your topic.
- The key words that work in the public library or periodical index may not work on an Internet search. For example, if you went to the library to research Sam Walton, and used Sam Walton as a key term, you might turn up ten books, but using Sam Walton on the Internet may turn up 2,000,000 sites. Therefore, establish expectations for your research and understand the type of results that you should expect in various forms of resources.

The Public Library

- This source can serve as a valuable source of resources for all programs. Some public libraries have videos for computer application courses. In addition, libraries may also possess special sections set aside as references for small business operators, law references, and general job search information.
- Most community library holdings (catalogs) are computerized. Many have an Internet site that allows you to search their catalog from your personal Computer (PC). To access your local library, type its name in your search engine.

Preparing for your work at the Public Library:

- Using the Internet prior to visiting the library can save you time. Not only can you narrow your search to a couple of resources, you can check the availability of the books you wish to check out as most web sites will let you know if the book is available or checked out.
- You can also get the call numbers of the book and when you arrive at the library, if you are unfamiliar with the organization of the library, you can ask at the front desk where books may be located so you do not wander aimlessly in the stacks of books.

- If the book is not available, you may be able to contact the library staff and ask for the book to be placed on hold for you. For specific questions about businesses in your area, you can contact your local Chamber of Commerce. The Small Business Administration Satellite Office may offer resources for those who are considering operating their own business.

Current Periodicals and Journals:

- Libraries also carry periodicals that can serve as sources of current information. Periodicals are publications such as journals, newspapers, or magazines. **Please note, this information can also be found in Gale Library.**
 - For example, *Reader's Guide* and periodical indexes come in a large variety of subject areas. The Reader's Guide is published in monthly supplements and at the end of the year; a volume is published that covers the whole year. Even if you find your subject in articles in the Reader's Guide, it doesn't mean that the library will have those periodicals available.
- When using periodicals for research, keep in mind that magazines are written for a general audience, written by journalists, generally offer no additional references and can be written like a story.
- Journals, on the other hand, are written for a specific audience, usually for the professional or student, they are written by someone who is trained in the subject area, they offer references, and they have a specific structure in the appearance.

Transitioning from the Brick and Mortar Library to the Internet:

- If you are unable to find resources in the brick and mortar library, you can elect to conduct your research by using the Internet.
- As described above, the Internet offers a wealth of resources for any subject and it can be accessed at any time. However, it can be difficult to use the Internet to gather information for research papers.
- Utilizing the Internet may take many hours in order to find useful information pertaining to your subject. **Therefore, you should use the Internet as a supplementary resource.**
- You also need to be aware that some sites may actually charge you to view their articles. Their initial web page lists links that you can click on, but then a dialog box appears asking for your User ID number and password. The ID and password might entail your requirement to subscribe to a site or some other form of membership.

Consider the Source of the Internet site:

- **You need to consider the source of the information that you read on the Internet.** Anyone with a server and Internet access can put any information on the Internet. You have no assurances that what you read is accurate or current.
- Therefore, you need to be cautious and try to find printed material that backs up the information you find on the Internet. Building on this concept, you need to ask yourself some basic questions:

- What server did I find this information on?
- Who wrote or put the information on the server?
- What are their credentials? If they do not provide an email or contact information, the article might be suspect.
- Do they have a hidden bias?
- When you do a search, some of the web pages may actually be advertising.
 - For example, if you use the key words Customer Service, your search may lead you to advertisements for Customer Service workshops, books and other reference sites. The information may still be useful to you, but you need to realize that it may be biased.
- Check for the date on the website. Is it current?
- If it has links to other sites, do they still work?
 - Older material may still be useful in your research, especially if you are looking for background information.
 - However, if you are researching something for the most recent statistic, you need to look for the most recent articles.

Reliability of the Internet

- Site addresses may change without warning. Some leave notes saying where they are now located; some just disappear.
- If a site disappears, it may not be a reliable site. Also, the information at a site may disappear. If you are researching a topic and find an article at a web site, the editors of that web site may remove the article from their site.
- Remember to document your resources from the Internet. Keep in mind that not all the sites offer free information. You may be able to find the same information at a public library for free.

Effective use of Search Engines:

- A search engine is a database of information about web pages. When you are using a search engine you are actually searching in the database that the search engine has compiled, **not the entire Internet**.
- It is reasonable to limit yourself to using one search engine. However, it may be necessary for you to use other search engines to gather additional information on a specific subject.
- Often, a search engine may have a link to another search engine so that you can gather more information on a topic.
- Another resource is Subject Directories that offer you subjects to choose from that can help narrow down your search. Remember again, that search engines and subject directories may be sponsored by businesses and advertisers that may have a bias.

Internet Search Basic Tips

- Start with a specific search term. If you start with a specific search term, you will shorten the list of possible sites to investigate. If you are unsuccessful, you can use more general search terms.

- If you are given a web site address and it doesn't work, shorten the web site and/or search using the name of the site without all other symbols.
- Use capital letters to begin proper nouns, this will help specify your search.
- Use the most important words first, again, this will narrow down your search options.
- Ensure that you are using accurate spelling. If you need additional assistance on how to conduct an internet search, please contact your instructor and/or your Student Success Coach.
- It may be helpful to **use Boolean operators** when you are doing an Internet search. Boolean operators use only three words: *and*, *or*, and *not*. Here is how they work:
 - "AND" narrows the search topic because both concepts must be in each record.
 - "OR" broadens the search topic because all records containing one or both of the terms are included.
 - If you need to broaden your topic, add synonyms or other phrases to the search strategy.
 - "NOT" eliminates unrelated records containing the concept.

Effective Record-Keeping:

- As you gather information for your paper, **remember to cite sources as you are taking your notes and keep a list of the resources you use.** Use a separate Word Document or Excel spreadsheet to keep accurate record of the sources.
- The rationale of this practice is to ensure that you have accurate and complete documentation and further, that your notes correctly cite your sources when you write your paper.

Plagiarism:

- It is important to cite your sources so that you do not plagiarize another's work. Therefore, you will unfortunately commit **plagiarism if you use ideas or writings of others as your own.**
- The following link provides a brief video on this subject for your clarification:
 - <http://en.writecheck.com/plagiarism-quiz>
- There are different formats used to cite your resources. Check with your instructor if you are unsure of the style they require. For most academic papers, the APA format is used. The following two links illustrate key information specific to APA format:
 - APA Formatting Link: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
 - APA Quiz Link: <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/tutorials/apatutorial/tutorialindex.html>

Bibliography for the Narrative

- Langan, John. College Writing Skills with Reading, 6th ed. McGraw-Hill., 2005.
- "Basic Library Research." Duskin Online, 1997. August 3, 2007, <<http://www.dushkin.com/online/study/dgen1.mhtml>>
- "Five criteria for evaluating Web pages." Olin & Uris Libraries (Cornell University Library, 1998, August 3, 2007 <<http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/webcrit.html> >

Additional Sites that could be helpful for your Research

Gale Internet Library:

- Valley College has an online library that puts thousands of resources within your grasp.
- To access the library, go to:
 - o <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/mar1321> and type *mar_log* in the password field.

Internet Sites:

- Cambridge Dictionaries Online
 - o <http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org>
 - o Search **online dictionaries**
- Encyclopedia Britannica
 - o <http://www.britannica.com>
 - o Online encyclopedia.
- Library Spot
 - o <http://www.libraryspot.com>
 - o General online library
- The Internet Public Library
 - o <http://www.ipl.org>
 - o General online library
- World Wide Web Virtual Library
 - o <http://www.vlib.org/>
 - o General online library
- Questia
 - o www.questia.com
 - o An online library that **you must subscribe to and pay monthly subscription costs**. The subscription automatically renews each month. You may cancel at any time.

Wikipedia:

- Wikipedia - <http://www.wikipedia.org> (*an online encyclopedia*)
 - o Wikipedia is written collaboratively by volunteers; the majority of the articles can be edited by anyone with access to the Internet. **Wikipedia is NOT a valid resource for any assignment, project, paper, portfolio or any other activity requested in a Valley College classroom.**

INTERNET SITES FOR PERIODICALS AND NEWSPAPERS:

- Business Week -- www.businessweek.com
- Forbes - www.forbes.com
- New York Times - www.nytimes.com
- Time Magazine - www.time.com
- USA Today -- www.usatoday.com
- Washington Post - www.washingtonpost.com

ACCOUNTING

- <http://www.dwmbeancounter.com/moodle/> (offers definitions and examples of accounting terms/principles)
- <http://www.quickmba.com/> (offers definitions and examples of accounting terms/principles)

BUSINESS

- <http://www.legis.state.wv.us> - West Virginia Legislative Reference & Information Center
- <http://www.bizjournals.com> - contains articles from many business newspapers in US
- <http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov> - Small Business Administration
- <http://www.quickmba.com/> - offers definitions and examples of Economics terms/principles)
- <http://www.fedstats.gov> - Fed Statistics from federal agencies, available broken down geographically, by agency, or in other forms.
- <http://www.findlaw.com> - Legal Professionals

COMMUNICATION

- <http://www.1000ventures.com>
- <http://www.englishgrammarsecrets.com> Business English exercises
- <http://www.bls.gov/oco/> US Department of Labor. *Occupational Outlook Handbook*
- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/> - good APA reference - online writing lab

COMPUTER SCIENCE (Application Related)

- PC Today - www.pctoday.com
- PC World -- www.pcworld.com
- PC Magazine -- www.pcmag.com

CYBERSECURITY

- <https://www.dhs.gov/topic/cybersecurity>
- <http://www.cybersecurityinformation.com/>
- <https://www.opm.gov/cybersecurity/>
- <https://www.csiac.org/>
- <https://www.eff.org/issues/cyber-security-legislation>

HISTORY

- <http://www.thefreelibrary.com> - Internet Library

HVAC

- <http://www.contractors-license.org/> for license requirements by state
- <http://www.ebooksstation.com/docs/pdf/HVAC-Reference-Book/4> for free downloads of e-books on HVAC topics

MANAGEMENT

- <http://management.about.com>

MARKETING

- <http://www.knowthis.com> a Marketing Virtual Library - includes hints on Marketing Plans
- <http://www.quickmba.com/> offers definitions and examples of marketing terms/principles

MATH/ALGEBRA/STATISTICS

- <https://clep.collegeboard.org/exam/college-algebra/questions>
- <http://www.analyzemath.com/algebra.html>
- <http://study.com/academy/exam/course/algebra.html>
- <http://www.freemathhelp.com/statistics.html>
- <http://www.mathsisfun.com/data/>
- <http://www.math.com/homeworkhelp/Statistics.html>
- <http://www.sosmath.com/>
- www.themathpage.com
- <http://www.mathzone.com/>
- <http://www.math.com/>
- <http://math.tutorvista.com/>

MEDICAL

- www.webmd.com offers health information and tools
- <http://www.tabers.com/tabersonline/ub/> *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* online
- www.cdc.gov Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- www.heart.org American Heart Association
- www.cancer.org American Cancer Society
- www.ama-assn.org American Medical Association
- www.medterms.com Medical Terminology
- www.nida.nih.gov National Institute of Drug Abuse
- www.goal.org In-Home Safety

NURSING ASSISTANT

- <http://ohflac.wv.gov/Programs/NA.html> Nurse Aide program for state of WV
- <http://www.nursingassistants.net/> Informational newsletter for Nursing Assistants

OFFICE PROCEDURES

- <http://us.deskdemon.com> Click on Career

PSYCHOLOGY

- Psychology Today - <http://psychologytoday.com>