

VALLEY COLLEGE

Reference Sheet

Basic Steps in the Research Process

1. Select a topic that can be easily researched.
2. Limit your topic and make the purpose of your paper clear.
2. Gather information on your topic.
3. Plan your paper and take notes on your topic.
4. Write the paper.
5. Use an acceptable format and method of documentation. Your instructor may offer you guidelines for your paper.

While completing your program of study at Valley College, you may find that you have assignments that require you to conduct additional research and write an essay or research paper on a specific topic. This Reference Sheet might be helpful to you. It discusses the basics on how to conduct research and 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.

When selecting a topic to research, you might want to start with the textbook you are using in the class. Textbooks offer a general discussion on topics that can lead to excellent research topics.

Textbooks often have bibliographies, a list of resources used by an author in preparing that a specific chapter. The bibliographies can be a springboard to your research pool. It can offer you specific titles of books or articles that you may want to research to find more details for your research paper.

Encyclopedias are also a good place to search for general topics. Like textbooks, they offer general discussions on a wide variety of topics and often have bibliographies at the end of the articles.

You need to select a topic that you are interested in. This makes it more enjoyable as you research the topic and write your paper. You must limit your 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 can be frustrating if you select a topic that is too broad or not broad enough. You need to select 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 cites.

The Public Library in your area can serve as a source of business resources. Some public libraries have videos for computer application courses. There may be special sections set aside as references for small business operators, law references, and general job search information. Most community libraries holdings (catalogs) are computerized. Many have an Internet site that allows you to search their catalog from your PC. To access your local library, type its name in your search engine. **Using the Internet prior to visiting the library can save you time.** Not only can narrow your search to a couple of

resources, you can check the availability of the books you wish to check out as most web site 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 at so you do not wonder 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.

Libraries also carry periodicals that can serve as sources of current information. Periodicals are publications such as journals, newspapers, or magazines. *Reader's Guide* and periodical indexes come in 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 journalist, 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.

If you are unable to find resources in the brick and mortar library, you can elect to conduct your research by using the Internet. **Although the Internet offers a wealth of resources for any subject and it can be accessed at any time, it can be difficult to use the Internet to gather information for research papers.** It may take many hours to find useful information pertaining to your subject. 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 id number and password.

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. You need to be cautious and try to find printed material that backs up the information you find on the Internet. 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.

Internet sites are not always reliable. 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.

Search engines can be used to help conduct research on the Internet. 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 whole 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 advertiser that may have a bias.

Some basic tips: 1) 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. 2) If you are given a web site address and it doesn't work, shorten the web site. 3) Use capital letters to begin proper nouns. 4) Use your most important words first. 5) Watch your spelling. If you need additional assistance on how to conduct an internet search, please contact your instructor.

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.

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.** It is better to over document your notes than to not have the information that you need to correctly cite your sources when you write your paper. It is important to cite your sources so that you do not plagiarize another's work. **You plagiarize if you use ideas or writings of others as your own.** 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 MLA format is used.

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> >

INTERNET SITES THAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO YOU

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

INTERNET GENERAL:

Cambridge Dictionaries Online <http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org> Search **online dictionaries**

Encyclopedia Britannica <http://www.britannica.com> Online encyclopedia.

Library Spot <http://www.libraryspot.com> General online library

The Internet Public Library - <http://www.ipl.org> General online library

World Wide Web Virtual Library - <http://www.vlib.org/> General online library

Questia – www.questia.com 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.

A WORD ABOUT

Wikipedia - <http://www.wikipedia.org> (*an online encyclopedia*) Wikipedia is written collaboratively by volunteers; the majority of the articles can be edited by anyone with access to the Internet. **It is not recommended to use material in research papers/projects.**

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 Stats** Statistics from federal agencies, available broken down geographically, by agency, or in other forms.

<http://www.findlaw.com> for Legal Professionals

COMMUNICATION

<http://www.1000ventures.com>

<http://www.englishgrammarssecrets.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

HISTORY

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com> an 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

<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>

SOCIOLOGY

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