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RESEARCH PROCESS TIPS

Introduction

So you've found some information related to your research topic or question. What do you do now?

Here are five steps to follow in order to complete your research project or paper efficiently and effectively

Step 1 - Dive in

First you, need to read of what you found. Maybe you chose an article because the title sounded relevant, or you you skimmed the article and it seemed like a good match. That's great, but now it's time to get serious and look closely for the information that will lay out the foundation for your paper or project.

It's important to read the entire source of information (although some of your reading may be skimming) to find the obvious and sometimes hidden information that will answer questions you have about your topic.

It's also important to take notes. Look for and highlight information that can be useful for your project. These could be arguments, supporting evidence, background information, or ideas that provide different perspectives on your projects.

It's helpful to tag that information with what it might be good for so that you can keep track when it comes time to use it. Repeat this process for every source of information you found.

Not finding anything useful in an article or book? Put it aside for now. You may find that it's helpful once you learn more about your topic from other sources. It's important to keep an open mind about the information you find. It isn't always obvious how helpful something is going to be right away.

Remember, the point of this is not for you to cut and paste a bunch of relevant quotes from articles into your own work and call it a day.

The point is for you to gather information that will   answer your questions so that you can build a strong argument or share your own ideas. You want to say something new/in your own voice in the context of the information you found. That's what research is all about.

Step 2 - Put it Together

At this point, what you've learned from your research should start to give you some ideas for the shape of your paper or project.

It's helpful to write these ideas out in an outline, whatever that looks like for you. Refer to your notes to help you complete this outline. Outlines aren't just for papers. They work for presentations, posters, videos… All kinds of projects.

Your outline might go through several drafts as you become more familiar with your research. Don't be afraid to write several versions of it.

Step 3 - Assess Progress

With your completed outline here are some questions to consider at this point:

1. Have I met all the paper/project requirements? (hint: look in the syllabus)
2. If I'm taking a position on something, is my position supported with evidence, and is that evidence coming from sources I trust.
3. Have I considered a variety of perspectives about the topic or question?

Step 4 - Go back
If it looks like you still need more information, then go back and search for sources that will fill in the gaps. Take the notes from your reading and look for key terms and ideas that you can use to search for new information.

Research can be a tricky process. Every step builds upon the work that you did previously, but sometimes you'll need to go back a step or two if you discover something is missing like a particular perspective or a piece of evidence.

Step Five - Go time

Write that paper or complete your project based on your outline. If you followed the previous steps, this shouldn't be too difficult and hopefully it's fun. Oh, and I know what you're thinking. YES! This process takes a long time. Get started as early as possible.

If you get stuck at any point, ask for help! There are people to help you at any point in this process.