How to Use American River College Library

A. Research Strategy

1. Identify and Develop Your Topic
   • State the topic as a question (Is human cloning ethical?)
   • Identify key terms (human cloning, ethics, genetics)
   • Broaden or narrow the topic as necessary

2. Determine the Information Requirements of the Assignment
   • What type of assignment is it? (quick speech, short or long paper)
   • How many information sources are needed?
   • Is current or historical information needed? For recent topics, see magazines or journals.
   • Must the information be from a particular type of publication? (scholarly journals, for instance)
   • Primary or secondary sources? -- Primary sources are original materials that contain first-hand information about a topic, including speeches, artwork, newspaper article, diaries, film documentary, autobiographies, etc. Secondary sources explain and analyze primary sources; they are a step removed from event and include textbooks, encyclopedias, biography, etc.
   • Format (video, audio, Internet, print, interviews, field trip)
   • Point of view (do you need to present one side of an issue or both?)

2. For an Overview of Your Topic, Find Background Information
   ▪ Use library reference materials: Subject encyclopedias and current topics books
   ▪ Databases: CQ Researcher, Opposing Viewpoints
   ▪ Ask a librarian for more background sources or where to find those listed.

4. Find Books on Your Topic using the Library Catalog
   • The library has books, e-books, DVDs, and magazines and journals in print.

5. Find Articles from Magazines, Journals, and Newspapers using Databases
   • Choose appropriate databases from the list, enter your keywords and conduct a search. Set limits by dates, full-text, and type of publication.

6. Find & Evaluate Internet Resources *(see also handout on Evaluating Sources)*
   ▪ Evaluate closely for type of website and its authority, scope, currency, etc.

7. Properly Cite Your Sources in your Bibliography or Works Cited page
   ▪ Standard formats commonly used at ARC: APA or MLA. *(see also handout)*
   ▪ Online, search for OWL Purdue and APA or MLA for guidance and examples.
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B. Basic Search Techniques and Examples

Note: It is useful to consult the help pages of the catalog, database, or search engine because each varies somewhat in recommended technique.

Boolean Logic Search (named for inventor George Boole, 1815-1864)
The Boolean operators AND, OR, NOT allow you to expand or narrow a search. OR expands a search. AND and NOT narrow a search. For example:

1. earthquakes AND California finds documents that must contain both words, which narrows the search from what you would find with either term. You will not retrieve documents on just earthquakes.

2. earthquakes OR tornadoes retrieves documents that have one or the other of these terms, as well as documents with both, thus expanding the search.

3. earthquakes NOT California finds documents that contain information on earthquakes, but not if the word California is mentioned.

4. earthquakes AND (California OR Nevada) finds information on earthquakes and/or California, and/or Nevada.

Phrase Search
Phrase searching allows you to search a string of words which have meaning together. If you type white collar crime into a database or a search engine, it may bring back documents that have the three words in different parts of the document. To do a phrase search, use quotation marks around the words, as in “white collar crime.”

Truncated Words and Wildcards
Using truncation and wildcards allows you to expand your search by finding plurals or variations of a word. Usually the symbol (*) is used.

1. Truncated example: veg* will find documents with the words vegetable, vegetables, vegetarian, etc.
2. Wildcard example: wom*n will find woman or women.

Case Sensitivity
Mostly librarians use lowercase for searches. Use uppercase letters to limit your search to proper names.

1. dolphins returns more documents on the animal.
2. Dolphins returns more documents on the Miami Dolphins football team.