

How to Form a Research Strategy

<http://infodome.sdsu.edu/howto/strategy.shtml>

An effective research strategy consists of the following steps. They are presented in order but may be done simultaneously or get repeated (see step 8). Research is not so much a linear process as it is cyclical.

1. **Identify a research topic.** Make sure you understand your research assignment. If you don't, ask whomever gave it to you for clarification.

To identify an appropriate topic consider framing your research assignment as a question. What are the main or related concepts? What, if any, are the research parameters: age, sex, ethnicity, time period, geographic location? Refer to your syllabus, textbook and other course readings, lecture notes, and Library sources (for example, specialized encyclopedias) for possible topics.

2. **Analyze your research problem.** What do you need to know about the topic of your research? What do you already know about this topic? What do you need to learn about the topic?
3. **Determine your information requirements.** What types of information (background versus in-depth, scholarly versus popular, factual versus descriptive, historical versus current, primary versus secondary) do you need to find?
4. **Identify your information source needs.** What types of [Information Packages \(Sources of Information\)](#) (books, periodical articles, Web documents) do you need to search for? What Library sources will help you fulfill your information needs? Are these resources accessible electronically or in print or both?
5. **Conduct your information searches.** Use your research topic concepts and parameters as key words or subject phrases. Gather relevant information using appropriate Library resources.
6. **Critically interpret, evaluate, and synthesize your information search results.** Just because a book, article, or Web document matches your search criteria and thus seems, at face value, to be relevant, does not mean that it is necessarily a reliable source of information. See [Evaluating Sources of Information](#).
7. **Avoid plagiarizing information sources.** When taking notes or copying information be sure to use quotation marks for anything noted or copied word for word from information sources. For each quote, keep track of the source: author(s), title, publisher, date of publication, page number(s). See the example in the paragraph after step 9.
8. **Review your research.** Along the way, take time to review your research and repeat any of the previous steps as necessary.
9. **Ask a librarian for assistance.** During your research, be sure to ask a librarian for [Research Assistance](#). Librarians can help you make the most of your time and energy.

While following the steps outlined above, keep in mind that "if you focus attention on finding well-defined answers, then you're not doing research, at least not scientific research. Research involves ideas, not answers."

John L. Casti, Paradigms Lost: Tackling the Unanswered Mysteries of Modern Science. New York: Avon Books, 1990. Page 12.