

How to Research a Topic

Gather Background Information	Find Books and Videos/DVDs	Find Periodical Articles	Search For Internet Resources
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Now that you have a topic selected, how do you go about researching it?
Doing research for a paper involves several steps:

Gather Background Information

Encyclopedias are good sources for background information. They will give you an **overview** of the main issues related to your topic. You can also find **specialized encyclopedias** in many subject areas, such as the social sciences. Reading background articles in encyclopedias can help you find **keywords** that are related to your topic, this will help when you begin searching databases for further information. Try using Encyclopedia Britannica through PC's [online databases](#).

Find Books and Videos/DVDs

To find books and videos/DVDs, you can use the [online catalog](#) at Phoenix College Library, or use a library that is close to your home. Books and audiovisual materials will provide more **in-depth coverage** of your topic. Books can be current, but they can also provide **historical information** which can be harder to find in periodicals. If you find a book that is related to your topic, but broader in scope, you can check the index and table of contents of the book, to see if there is a chapter or section about your specific topic.

Find Periodical Articles

To find magazine, newspaper, and journal articles, use PC's [online databases](#). Periodical articles will usually provide more **current information** than books or encyclopedias. They are **narrower in scope**, and discuss a **specific topic** in a **detailed manner**. It is best to search several of the databases to ensure that you get good coverage of your topic. Each database indexes some periodicals that the others don't. There are also **subject specific databases**, such as "ScienceDirect" that can be very helpful if they relate to your topic.

Find Periodical Articles (continued)

Sometimes your instructor will want you to only use information from **scholarly journals**. Several of the online databases have a checkbox that allows you to limit your search to "refereed publications" or "peer reviewed" sources. This means the articles have been published in a scholarly journal that reviews the content before publishing. If you need help figuring out if a publication is a journal or a magazine, ask a reference librarian, or refer to the following guide:

For more information on the difference between these types of sources, check out our guide: [Scholarly Journal v. Magazine Articles: How Can You Tell the Difference?](#)

Search For Internet Resources

You can search for information on the World Wide Web using Internet [search engines](#). Phoenix College librarians have created [Research Guides](#) that can also point you to useful and reliable library resources and/or internet resources. Information on the web can be used to **supplement** your other sources. Often websites have very **current information**. Sometimes they contain information, such as up-to-date **statistics** or **graphics**, that is hard to find in other sources. Since anyone can post a web site, it is very important to use **caution** and [carefully evaluate information](#) that is found on the Internet.

Contact a librarian if you need more help.
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Library Reference Desk (602) 285-7470