Before You Start Your Research

Write a topic overview.
What do you already know about your topic? Write it down. All of it. This will give you a place to begin and an idea of how much work is ahead of you.

Define your task(s).
What are the requirements of the project? In other words, what are the necessary ingredients for you to achieve success? Examples may include one or more of the following:

- Fact finding (gathering and presenting information)
- Information analysis (examining, interpreting, and explaining information)
- Persuasion (influencing your audience to view information as you do)
- Problem solving (presenting information about a crisis and its resolution)
**Formulate questions.**

- Make a list of research questions that will give your project direction.

  *Example:* What are the primary causes of global warming?

- Use your questions to make a list of keywords. These can be used later when you start your research, especially with online resources.

  *Note:* Use your keywords to make a list of synonyms as well as related, broader, and narrower search terms.

  *Example:* The key word or term in the example question is global warming. A synonym would be greenhouse effect and a related term might be ozone depletion.

**Set goals.**

- Keeping your tasks and questions in mind, determine what you hope to accomplish with your project or paper.

  a. What do you want your audience to learn from the information you are presenting?

   b. What is the best way to present that information?

- Using your keywords and research questions, develop a thesis statement. You will refer back to this statement throughout the process of completing your project.
Conducting Your Research

*Select your resources.*

- Figure out which materials are going to work best for your project. Options include: online research databases as well as books, reference books, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers, audio and video files, and search engines.
- Determine the pros and cons of your resource choices.
  a. Which include the most information?
  b. Which are the most accurate?
  c. Which are easiest to use? Which are fastest?

*Gather information.*
Read, watch and/or listen to everything you’ve collected.

*Evaluate your information.*
This is the time to make sure your information meets the requirements you defined in steps 2 through 4.

- Will it help you to complete your tasks?
- Does your research answer all or most of your questions?
- Will your research allow you to attain your goals and prove the points in your thesis statement?

*Note:* If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” you may need to do more research, review your information to find more answers or weed out information that will not be helpful.
Coordinate your information.

- Organize and repackage your information in an outline.
- Write a rough draft.
- Ask someone you trust to help edit your draft; a second pair of eyes is invaluable.

Produce your final product.

Whether the final product is a research paper, editorial, dramatic presentation, audio/video production, art project, oral report, debate, or any other project, if you carefully followed steps 1 through 8, you have already improved your odds of success!