



Research Step-by-Step

Library

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

- A. Begin with a general idea of a topic.
Standardized testing in the schools
- B. State your topic as a question.
Does standardized testing increase student achievement?
- C. Identify the main concepts in your topic.
Standardized tests, student achievement
- D. Identify additional search terms (synonyms and related words) for each concept.

<i>MAIN CONCEPTS</i>	<i>ADDITIONAL TERMS</i>
<i>Standardized tests</i>	<i>Assessment, SAT 9 Achievement tests</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>K-12 Children Youth</i>
<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Learning Academic Performance Skills</i>

- E. Do a preliminary search to determine if your topic is too broad or too narrow. Use your search terms and look for information in:
1. Reference books and encyclopedias
 2. Articles in a general database like *INFOTRAC*
- F. Revise your topic if necessary.
1. If you find too much information, narrow your topic by adding more specific terms.
Does the California SAT 9 increase student achievement at the high school level?
 2. If you find too little information, broaden your topic by using more general terms, using fewer search terms, doing a Boolean OR search, or truncating the search terms.
What are the advantages and disadvantages of standardized testing?

2. FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN BOOKS

- A. Use your textbook or a general encyclopedia to locate basic information about your topic.
- B. Use the library catalog, *PEARL*, to find library books.
- C. Look at the bibliographies in books and at the end of encyclopedia articles. These bibliographies list books and articles that might be useful.
- D. Look at the catalogs of other libraries in the Bay area (on the COA Library Homepage see "Other Libraries").

3. FIND MORE SPECIFIC OR CURRENT INFORMATION IN ARTICLES

- A. Use the COA Library's article databases (on the COA Library Homepage see "Online Magazine Indexes and Resources").
- B. *INFOTRAC* is a good database to use first. It has thousands of articles on a wide range of topics.
- C. The COA Library has other databases that focus on specific areas – business, law, art, music, science, ethnic groups, current events. Use any of these that fit your topic.

4. FIND SPECIALIZED INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

- A. The COA Library homepage has links to help you.
- B. "Internet Search Engines" lists search engines that are good for college research.
- C. "Subject and Study Guides" lists many categories of web sites. For example, the "Statistics" web sites might provide valuable data for an argumentative essay.

5. EVALUATE WHAT YOU HAVE FOUND

- A. Have you found the information you need to answer your research question?
- B. Are your sources – especially those you found on the World Wide Web – reliable, complete, and up-to-date? See the COA Library handout, "Evaluation of Information Resources."

6. CITE YOUR SOURCES

- A. Citing your sources is an important part of the research process. You want to be sure that anyone who reads your paper could find your sources. You also need to give credit to others for their research and ideas and to be careful that you do not commit plagiarism (see the COA Library handout "Plagiarism").
- B. Ask your instructor if a particular citation style is required (MLA, APA, Turabian, Chicago, etc.). The library has copies of several citation manuals and has handouts for MLA and APA.
- C. Be sure to copy down all the citation information you need as you use each source. A good practice is to make a copy of the first page of each article and web site. Copy the title page of books that you use.
- D. List your sources in a Works Cited at the end of your paper.
- E. In the body of the paper use parenthetical references or footnotes (see MLA or APA handouts).