

Library Life Savers

The Library can save your life

5 Steps to Researching More Efficiently



Create a space for your research.

Make physical and virtual folders for the research material you'll be finding before you begin. You can tote your hardcopies around in your physical folder, and keep your electronic copies (PDFs, URLs) organized in a virtual folder on your desktop or other location on your computer. It's also handy to have another virtual folder in RefWorks (or whichever bibliographic management software you're using).



Set a time limit on each research session.

Research is an iterative process: plan, gather, review, and analyze. Sometimes it's hard to know when to stop. Search for material on your subject for an hour, two hours, or whatever works for your schedule. Set a timer. Stick to your time limit. Later go back and look at what you found. Is it good stuff? Is it enough? If not, dive in to round two.



Record the citation for every document or image you print, save, or read the FIRST time you find it.

We've all heard the stories. There seems to be at least one each year. Scholars nailed for plagiarism due to sloppy note-taking. Avoiding plagiarism means being careful and being exact in recording citations, taking notes, and citing the ideas and words of others in your research papers. Plus, this way saves time—no having to go back and find it later. Make it even easier by using RefWorks (or another bibliographic management software) to keep track.



Write out a search strategy before you start.

Analyze your research question(s) and decide which resources to search in which order. Are there books available that will give you an overview of your topic or synthesize the research to date? Which journals are most likely to cover your topic? Which databases are those journals indexed in? Write down all the keywords you'll use in the search. Conceptualize your research using a Venn diagram. All of these tactics will help your research go more smoothly.



Use your librarian.

When you get stuck, can't find what you need, don't know where to start, help is one email, phone call, or visit away. As Linton Weeks has said, "In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us how to swim." Stop on by for a few swimming lessons any time.