How to Research a Term Paper

How do I find a topic?
- Try to find a topic that interests you
- Find ideas in:
  - Books / Textbooks (scan table of contents and index)
  - Research databases / Periodicals (e.g. SIRS Knowledge Source, CQ Researcher)
  - Library of Congress Subject Heading list
  - Encyclopedias
  - World Wide Web
- Be aware of topics that are too:
  - recent
  - regional
  - emotional
  - complex
  - broad
  - narrow
- Ask yourself:
  - Do I understand the topic?
  - How much information do I need?
  - Does enough information exist to fill this paper? (Broaden your topic)
  - Is there too much information to fit into this paper? (Narrow your topic)

How do I formulate a thesis?
- A thesis is a statement that states the main idea of your paper. It defines the scope and focus of your essay so that your readers know what to expect from the essay.
- Ask yourself what the focus or purpose of your paper is and then set out to prove it in the body of your paper.

How do I prepare an outline?
- List the major points and ideas of your thesis.
- Put similar points together so your paper will follow a logical order.

Where do I find information?
- Definition or Overview – Encyclopedias, subject encyclopedias, Gale Virtual Reference (database)
- Extensive Information – Books, eBooks
- Specific Topic – Journal articles (Research databases), periodicals, magazines, etc.
- Current Events – Newspapers, News websites, NewsBank (database)

All these can be found both online and in paper. When using Internet resources, make sure your sources are reliable. Try to limit your web search results to government websites or educational institutes by using the “site:” command. (For example: autism site:.gov)
How do I evaluate my resources?
- Is the information from a reliable source?
- Is the information sufficient to cover my topic?
- Is it relevant to my thesis statement?
- Is the information current?
- Does the information reflect just one side of the argument, or is it biased?
- Think critically about Web information. Apply the “CRAAP Test” to evaluate Web sources: C – Currency; R – Relevance; A – Authority; A – Accuracy; P – Purpose

How do I take notes and write the text of the paper?
- Note where you find all your information, including page and author, for your citations.
- Note how you would use each piece of information based on your outline. Consider using index cards or separate pieces of paper, or creating notes on the computer so you can easily organize all your notes.
- Organize your notes so that they flow logically.
- Pay attention to correct writing elements such as grammar, spelling, effective phrasing of ideas, and good paragraph development.
- Have someone else read through your paper to double check it.
- Watch this video to learn how to take notes during research: http://video.butte.edu/media/Library/TakingNotes.html (Library home page > Instruction Video > Taking Notes and Documenting Sources)

How do I document the sources?
- Acknowledge any sources you used with proper citation format, e.g., APA, MLA.
- Remember to use citations both within the document (following quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material) and the References or Works Cited page.

Keep in mind:
- Remember that spelling and grammar does count.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense. Document all sources you used.
- Librarians are here to help. Don’t hesitate to ask. Contact the librarians in person, by phone (Main Campus: 879-4024; Chico Center: 879-4398), or via 24/7 Live Chat (chat box at the right of the Library home page at www.butte.edu/library)


Other useful resources:

**Books**
Razakis, Laurie. *Schaum’s quick guide to writing great research papers* (eBook)
A P A. *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* BF76.7.P83 2010

**Websites**
*Purdue Online Writing Lab* (writing guide, MLA & APA citations) http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/