Introduction
There are many ways to tackle research for your studies at College of the Rockies. It does not matter if you are in a business program, nursing, and general arts, trades, or the sciences, there are rudimentary steps to take when researching ANY topic in ANY course for ANY type of assignment. To set the tone of this presentation, let’s parse each of these terms to get a better understanding of research.

“Sense”: the ability to think clearly or in a reasonable way

“Research”: careful study that is done to find and report new knowledge about something

: the activity of getting information about a subject

Suffix: -able: able to be; -ity: state, condition, or quality

The time you invest to plan your research and execute these steps will reap you many rewards. For example: getting the right background information provides a strong foundation upon which your paper or assignment can rest. Getting the best possible and applicable definitions for terms and your topic brings greater integrity to your work, and strengthens any argument you make or position you take in your paper or assignment.

Knowing which format provides what kind of information is critical – don’t waste your time on articles if there is a chapter in one or two books that offer in-depth information about your topic. Don’t waste your time on newspaper articles, websites, editorials, or reviews when your instructor has told you to use only peer-reviewed articles. Evaluate ALL your materials for relevance, accuracy, and authority at the minimum. Attribute ALL materials to avoid plagiarism. Don’t use images you find on the internet without filtering for copyright privileges.

Go to the Writing Lab located in the library and get help so you can correctly structure your work and write grammatically correct sentences, and cite correctly.

Following these seven steps is an easy way to ensure you are on target for your topic, positions, and finding appropriate resources.
Research Strategies: 7 Steps

Background Information
This is important. This is essential. Those skipping this step do so at their intellectual peril. Finding the definitions of the terms you intend to use in your work provides your reader - aka. your instructor - some confidence that you understand at least the fundamentals of your topic or subject area. For you, getting a clear and concise definition of your topic and terms helps you keep control of the paper and of the information for which you are going to search. Without fundamentally defining your topic and terms, the information you collect and your paper as you write, can get unruly, overwhelming, and lack continuity pretty quickly.

For example: nursing students would use the CINAHL database for detailed medical terms, procedures, and studies. Philosophy students might use one of the many online encyclopaedias or dictionaries available through the library catalogue or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [http://plato.stanford.edu/](http://plato.stanford.edu/)

Analyze Topic
Think about these 5 things when you are analysing your topic:

Does your topic:

1) have distinctive words or phrases - for example “methernitha” has a unique meaning but “affirmative action” while specific is only unique when applied to a focused area of research - find the broader concept by finding the areas where that term is mostly used and how it is used - you will have to use dictionaries and encyclopaedias to find distinctive terms. (Methernitha a term invented by [Swiss clockmaker/inventor Paul Baumann's M-L Converter](http://plato.stanford.edu/), has been ranked by the Institute for New Energy as one of the most promising over-unity devices produced so far. Baumann is one of those unusual self-taught individuals who has reportedly successfully developed a free-energy machine. This converter is named after the commune for which it was built and is used.)

2) have NO distinctive words or phrases - for example “order out of chaos” – you will have to use dictionaries and encyclopaedias to find distinctive terms (you will find this term refers to various change theories)

3) too broad – for example: Victorian literature, ethics, alternative energy sources. This would require searching through books (print or online) to find a more focused research topic
Research Strategies: 7 Steps

4) specify a **narrow topic** – automobile recyclability is really really narrow and specific and very recent therefore probably only available in articles or podcasts or online videos or newspaper articles.

5) Synonyms or alternative spellings - for example: green living is also sustainably lifestyle. Be sure you use databases that offer Boolean operator searching.

**Search Strategy**

This really needs to be workable for YOU. Search strategies will follow the foundational steps outlined in this information literacy skill development session but ultimately it has to be YOURS. You will have to learn:

- to vary the amount of time you spend on any one step in the process.
- when to go back a step to look up other or more definitions, to find books to support or refute the concepts you find in articles.

Building lists of **keywords** is essential to your research success. This step **CANNOT** be skipped.

Here is an example: you are looking for books and articles on fetal alcohol syndrome. That’s a specific term yet broad research area. You must focus on a few selected areas. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is also abbreviated to FAS and some research will use that acronym instead of the full phrase. Building lists of terms that describe the problems caused by the syndrome - physical deformities, mental retardation, learning disorders, vision difficulties and behavioral problems is very important. Start by writing keywords that pertain to specific areas of interest such as: definition of FAS, symptoms, causes, risk factors, tests and diagnosis, treatments and drugs, support and coping, and prevention.
Search the Catalogue, Databases, & eBooks
It is important to know when to stop using a particular search engine or database. No ONE database is perfect or appropriate. Switching from search engine to dictionary to book to catalogue to article and back again is the best process for you to find the best possible information for your work.

Use the RIGHT and appropriate database for your topic. For example: Nursing topics use PubMed, and CINAHL but not just CINAHL the library buys from EBSCO. Nursing students use CINAHL in the OVID database so you can get to the Primal Anatomy TV collection. Get your own personal account for those interfaces so you can create files and save images and articles within the interface. Look strategically through the library catalogue. If you are looking for information in the subject area of ANTROPOLOGY you will use Academic Search Premier, the ebook collection, AND the library catalogue.

If you don’t know where to look nor what is the best resource for reliable information – ask your librarian – Julie Kent, Room H120, in the library.

Organize
Sort your materials and create a folder on your desk top or in another secure location (electronically) to keep track of ALL your research items or print ALL the material you find.

For example: put all your electronic resources in a separate file, print journals and books in another. WHY? Because you cite electronic materials differently than you do print and you do NOT want to get them mixed up.

Evaluate
Use the CRAAP test to evaluate websites. ALWAYS be skeptical when looking at any information you find online. Be very critical when you evaluate such sources.

Critically evaluate ALL resources for appropriateness to your topic, currency of information provided, authorship – journalist or researcher - ownership of publication (online or in print)

If in doubt- do NOT use it.
Citation
ALL the citation styles used at COTR have manuals available at the Reference desk in the library. Some are available online. Your librarian (Julie Kent) has also developed a collection of handouts for the most commonly cited resource format for you to take and keep for future reference.

Use Research and Documentation Online to learn how to accurately attribute the work of others that you use in your work. See: http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/

Conclusion
The support provided to you by the Library and the Writing lab offers you the opportunity to research and writing well on any assignment or paper during your studies at COTR. Your library has millions of articles for you, thousands of books, dozens of research tools, and knowledgeable and expert librarian.

The Writing Lab is staffed by volunteer tutors keen to help you structure your paper and write it in a logical order free of grammatical errors.

Follow these seven steps for a sensible research process, one you can easily adopt.

What more would you like to know?
Contact me: Julie Kent – Your Librarian.