



## PLANNING A RESEARCH PAPER

It is important to choose a topic that is interesting to you, that you can research, and that is narrow enough to address in the context of your paper. Determine the purpose of the paper and the audience (read the professor's instructions for the assignment carefully). Focus the topic by understanding both the purpose and the audience.

### **Begin researching your topic:**

- Get a broad overview of your topic.
- Draft a preliminary thesis statement.
- Use primary and secondary sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES are surveys, experiments, or interviews. In addition, primary sources are the firsthand, raw, and original materials that researchers both study and analyze.

SECONDARY SOURCES are reviews, discussions, critical studies, and analyses of literary or artistic works or events.

### **Use reference works:**

- government documents
- bibliographies
- biographies
- encyclopedias
- almanacs, atlases, and gazettes
- dictionaries
- indexes
- databases

**Check the footnotes and bibliography of journal articles and books for other sources of information.** After researching, read the material to gain understanding of the topic. It is important to evaluate the sources of information. Nevertheless, simply because a work is published does not mean that the information presented is valid and legitimate.

### **When researching a published work, ask the following questions:**

- Does the author have the "credentials" to be an expert in the field?
- Is the information presented reliable?
- Have you found other sources that verify the information?
- Does the author support the claims with evidence?
- Is the author's tone unbiased, objective?
- Is the author's reasoning logical?
- Is the information current?

**During the course of your research, remember to make notes on the reading, record all bibliographical data, and photocopy important information.**