Top Ten Research Tips for First Year Students

1. Understand your assignment: Make sure you read your assignment prompt thoroughly and understand the expectations of your professor. It is important that you are searching the appropriate types of resources, and be sure to ask questions if anything is unclear.

2. Choose your topic wisely! If possible, try to choose a topic that is interesting to you personally. Avoid a topic that is too broad or too narrow – you’ll want something that is specific enough to allow for a strong thesis statement, but also has enough information written about it to support your argument.

3. Schedule your research: It is so tempting to procrastinate! But it really is easier to set a few specific deadlines for yourself so that you stay on track. For example, set a date for finding a certain number of sources, then a date for having an outline done, etc.

4. Explore background info: Before you start researching the specifics of your topic, it helps to have an understanding of the larger context of the subject. Books, encyclopedias, and other reference materials from the library are good places to go. Even Wikipedia is a good source to explore keywords, look over suggested references, and get an overview of the topic (just don’t rely on it as an academic source).

5. Use a variety of sources: While it depends on your assignment requirements, it’s usually a good idea to consult different types of sources to support your research. Think about whether you can go beyond books and articles. Is there a film clip in Films on Demand that has information on your topic? Would data or statistics from a government website support your point? Interviews? Primary documents?

6. Library databases: Using the library’s subscription databases can make your research much easier. Not only will you have full text access to thousands of reliable resources, but the databases have tools that help you get the most relevant results possible. Just use the library’s homepage as a starting off point (SacLink ID and password will allow you to access it all online from anywhere): library.csus.edu

7. Tackle one piece at a time: Having an outline will help you from feeling too overwhelmed. Just work on one section at a time, and don’t worry too much about the connections until it’s time to put it all together for a first draft.

8. Take good notes: Whether you use a notepad and pen or a digital app, taking good notes is key to doing good research. Be sure to know what information is coming from what sources, so that citations will be easier as you write and form your references page.

9. Citation tools: There are multiple ways to make sure you are citing your sources correctly. The library has guides to each type of format, and students also have access to EndNote, a program for managing references.

10. Ask for help: Tons of help is available! Librarians are here to make sure you are finding the information you need and understanding the research process. You can contact them in person, by phone, email or even chat (check our website)! Librarians have also created research guides that you can consult online anytime! Visit csus.libguides.com

When in doubt, start at the library!

Sources: