

TIPS FOR SELECTING A RESEARCH TOPIC

Read your assignment sheet carefully.

Brainstorm for a topic that fits the assignment and interests you.

You may need to narrow your topic to begin researching effectively. To narrow a topic, choose a specific:

- time period
- place/region
- group of people
- event/aspect

For example, a paper on the Bush Administration could be limited to the first term (2001-2004,) its effect on a geographic region (the Midwest,) a group of people (taxpayers,) and aspect (economic status). From this restricted topic you can formulate a research question, such as: Did the economic status/well-being of Midwesterners improve during the first Bush administration?

Still not sure how to narrow a topic? You can still start your research. The process of research, in particular a subject-term search, may help you to further focus your topic.

LIBRARY WEBSITE

Use the library website as your springboard to academic research. From the college homepage, click on **CURRENT STUDENT**, and then **Library and Research**. Here you will find links to start your research, and if you want help at any time, use the right column of the opening screen of the library website to access tutorials and research guides. The “Ask the Librarian” fill-in form is helpful with specific research questions when a Librarian is on staff. The library phone number and off-campus access instructions are also listed.

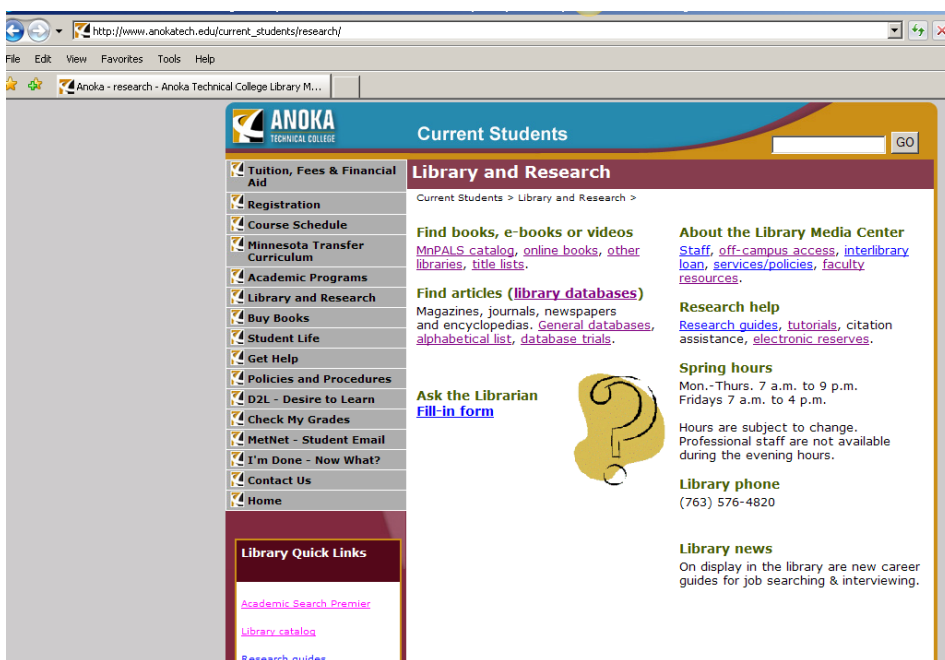


Fig. 1 Library website

BOOKS

The library owns **books** relating to current social issues, pro & con arguments, and just maybe some other information to support your argument/thesis. Use the library website's link to access **MnPALS**, our library catalog. Type in a keyword. If there are too many search results, add a word such as *viewpoints* or *issue*. These words match a lot of books that have helped English Comp. students begin their research. Most library books check out for three weeks.

ACADEMIC (ARTICLE) DATABASES

You will need to use the library's website to access articles from journals, magazines, and newspapers. Plan to **use at least two article databases** for most English Comp. research assignments. Use the library website's "general databases" or "library databases" (alphabetical) link. Our general databases include:

- a. **Academic Search Premier** – (Recommended!) A popular and extensive academic database (4700+ full text journals), plus magazines and some newspapers. (To view a 2 minute flash tutorial explaining how to search Academic Search Premier, go to: http://www.anokatech.edu/current_students/research/Tutorials.html Be sure to turn on the audio.)
- b. **CQ Researcher** - CQ Researcher reports offer in-depth, non-biased coverage of political and social issues, with regular reports on topics in health, international affairs, education, the environment, technology and the U.S. economy. Includes pro-con arguments & bibliographies.
- c. **(Proquest) Career & Technical Education** - Trade and professional journals for multiple fields.
- d. **Proquest Newspapers** - 250 full text national and international newspapers.
- e. **MegaFILE** – An extended version of Academic Search Premier (above), which includes some trade journals and regional business news.

TIPS FOR SEARCHING

There are important differences between searching the Internet at large and searching an article database. First, you must understand that databases are compiled using human intervention in an attempt to organize, tag, and describe the **content**, which was previously published in print. Most article databases return results in **chronological order**. They also use a **controlled vocabulary** to describe the articles' subject matter. For example, the database **Academic Search Premier** uses the **subject term** "Older People" to describe the elderly or aged. Here are some important techniques to revise an initial search:

1. To increase the **relevancy**: The easiest way to do this is demonstrated in the brief Academic Search Premier tutorial – click on an article title that is close to your research intentions and look at the "subject terms" right underneath the source information. If one of the terms matches your topic more closely, click on it to start a new search. Proquest and other databases also have subject links within the article citation.

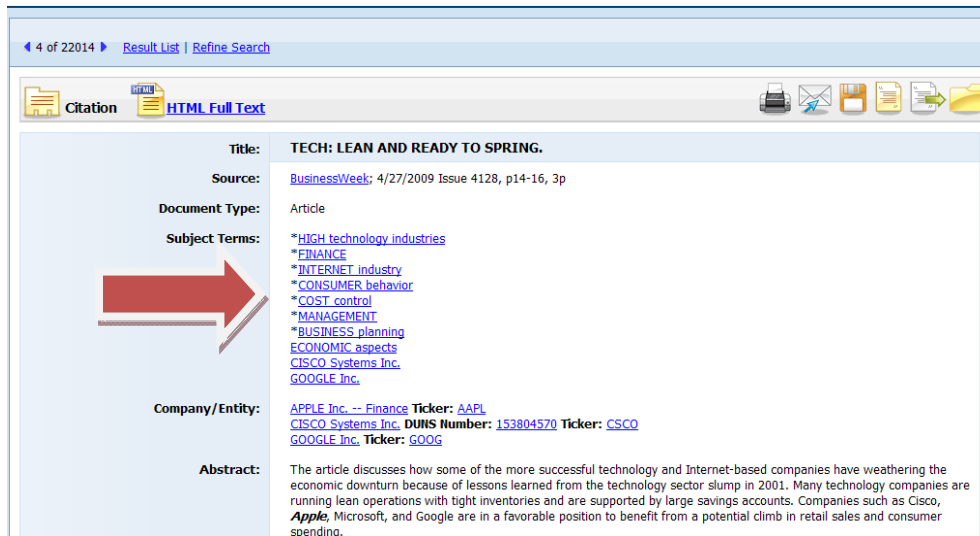


Fig. 2 Subject Terms in an Academic Search Premier citation

2. To **expand** a search:
 - a. **Truncate** a word with the asterisk. For example, environment* will return results with the words environment, environments, environmental, environmentalism.
 - b. **Unclick the “full text”** box to increase your options to articles that are not “full text” and can be ordered through interlibrary loan. (When you have time to wait several days.)
 - c. **Search within** the full-text of articles. For example, in Academic Search Premier, click on “Search Options” and check “also search within the full-text of the articles”. In Proquest Newspapers, use the advanced search tab and “document text” from the drop-down list.
3. To **narrow** a search:
 - a. Select the publication type “Academic Journals,” required for many assignments. (In Academic Search Premier – see the upper left column.)
 - b. Add a keyword to your search.
 - c. Try the advanced search feature with the drop-down boxes to limit a search to particular database fields, such as “source” (journal name).
 - d. Try the “Refine Search” option in Proquest (next to the # of articles received). In Academic Search Premier or MegaFILE, try the “search limits” or “search options”.

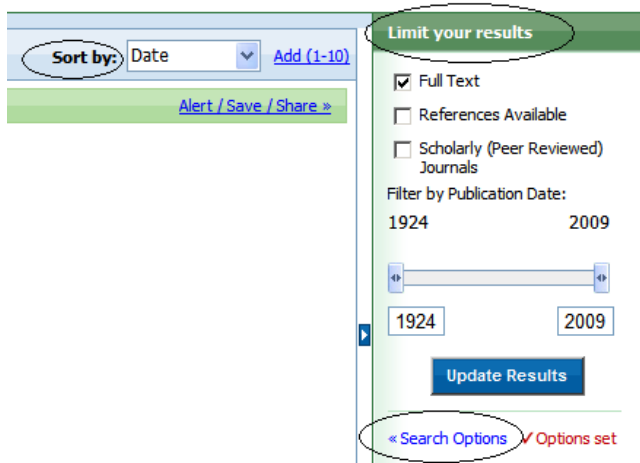


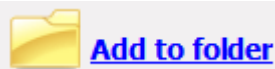
Fig. 3 Right-hand column in Ac.SearchP.

After you set some limits, (in particular a date range,) then you might want to sort your results by relevance. The “Sort by” option is also circled in Figure 3.

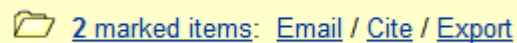
SAVE YOUR RESEARCH

One of the many benefits to online research is that you can easily organize your sources. Take advantage of the following features! All of them are designed for you to **select** what interests you, print/email/or save the documents/citation so that you can **cite** and **reaccess** them.

Academic Search Premier and other “EBSCO” databases: ADD the articles you like to a **FOLDER**. Print/save/email the sources (PDFs email separately). Select Citation Format **MLA** so that the bibliographic information will be in the order you need it for your Works Cited page (you will still need to edit it).



Proquest and a few other databases: MARK the articles you are interested in by checking the box next to the title; eliminate the other ones by clicking on **X marked items**. Select “Create your bibliography,” citation style **MLA**, for help formatting your Works Cited page, and to print, save, or email your sources.



PLACE YOUR INTERLIBRARY LOANS

(Uh-oh, requires planning in *advance!*) For quality research, you shouldn’t limit yourself to what is immediately available. If you have several days to wait for additional sources to arrive, you can follow these steps for obtaining items from other Minnesota libraries.

To borrow **books** from other libraries, do a search in MnPALS. In the **Library to Search** drop-down box, select “All MnPALS libraries”. (It is next to the last in the list.) From the results of your search, select the title you desire, then click on the “ILL request” link above the title display. (See Figure 4.) Enter your library barcode and last name.

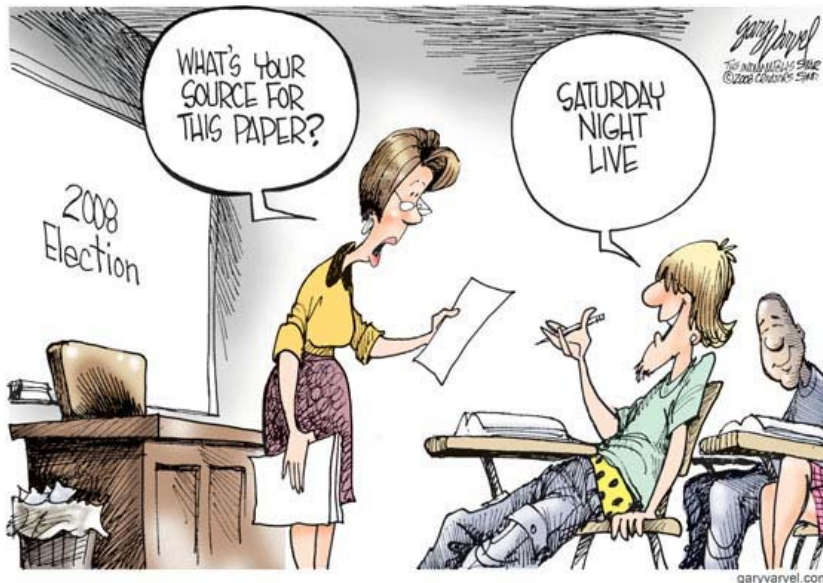
To borrow **articles** that are not full-text in EBSCO databases, click on “Interlibrary Loan and/or Request” and logon with library barcode and last name. A form appears with your article information inserted. Scroll to the bottom and select “I have read the above statement...” and click GO. For article citations that you find in other databases, print the article(s) citation(s) and bring them to Susan in the library. Provide her with an email address if you would like them delivered by email (faster service).



Fig. 4 MnPALS Interlibrary Loan link

Note: Off-campus Access

To gain access to the ATC Library's databases off-campus, use your student ID card. First, you must get your card activated in the library (ARC). Stop by or call the library, 763-576-4820. Your **library barcode** is on the **back** of your ID. (20424...) Your **library password** is your last name. See also "off-campus access" in the "About the Library" section of the library website.



Permission sought from The Indianapolis Star.

MORE HELP

Visit the library! You would be amazed how much time you can save by getting help at the library. Or from home, use the "Ask the Librarian" fill-in form for additional help when a librarian is on staff. LIBRARY main phone: 763-576-4820