Introduction to Library Research

Anoka Technical College Library Media Center
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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 George W. 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, scroll down to **Student Services**, and click on **Library**. 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 a Librarian" fill-in form under **Contact Us** is helpful for specific research questions.

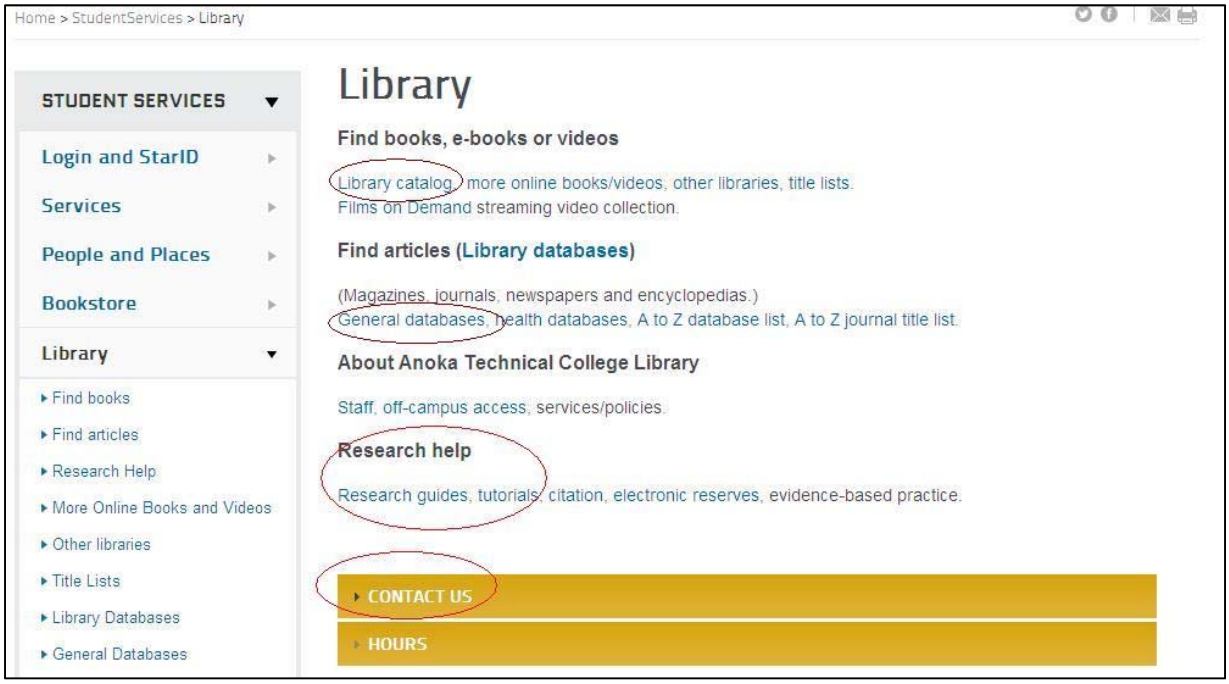


Fig. 1 Library website

BOOKS

The library owns **books** relating to current social issues, pro & con arguments, and just maybe some other information to support your argument/thesis. To find books, use the **library catalog**. Type in a keyword. If there are too many search results, add a word such as ***viewpoints*** or ***issues***. These words match a lot of books that have helped English Comp. students begin their research. If you don't already have a topic, use the keyword ***Greenhaven*** to see a variety of topic ideas from an excellent publisher. Bring the call number and title(s) to the library desk for assistance. 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. Access a 2 minute video for an overview of how to compose a basic search Ebsco (including Academic Search Premier).

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. Usually the search results in article databases can be resorted in **chronological order**. The indexers 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 senior citizens. Here are some important techniques to revise an initial search:

1. To increase the **relevancy**: The easiest way to do this in Academic Search Premier is to look to the left of your keyword search results, scroll down and click on **Subject**. If one of the subject terms matches your topic closely, click on that subject term to limit the results to this subject. Proquest and other databases also have similar subject link options.

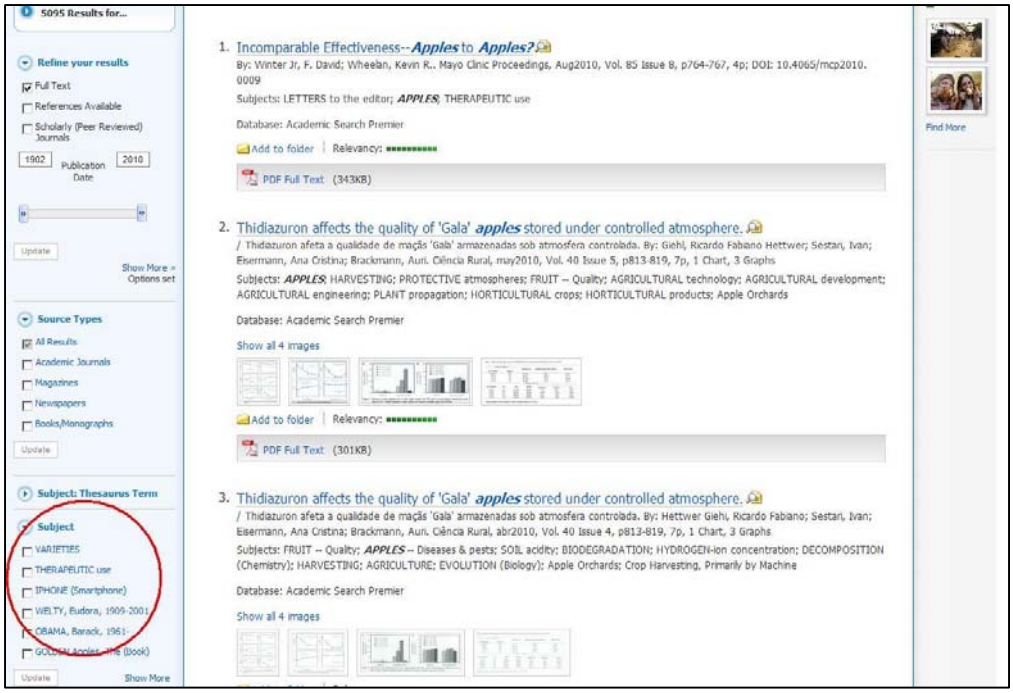


Fig. 2 Subject Terms in an Academic Search Premier results list

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, select **Advanced** and then "Document text -- FT" from the drop-down list.
3. To **narrow** a search:
    a. Select the source type "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals" or "Academic Journals" in the left-hand column next to your search results. Scholarly (Academic) journals are required for many assignments.
    b. Add a keyword to your search after the connector AND. Example: earthquake AND Chile.
    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 **Show More** (search options) for a variety of search limits. Select limits one at a time to gauge the difference in your search results.

<u>SAVE YOUR RESEARCH</u>

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: SELECT the articles you are interested in by checking the box next to the title. Select "Cite," citation style MLA 7TH edition, to create a citation for your Works Cited page. And/or **select** sources to print, save, or email.

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 **articles** that are not full-text in EBSCO databases, click on "Request this item through interlibrary loan" and fill out the form.

To borrow **books** from other libraries, search the **library catalog**. In the **Anoka Technical College** drop-down box, scroll to the top and select "All Libraries". (It is first in the list.) Search, select the title you desire, then click on the "login" at the bottom of the screen. (See Figure 3.) Enter your library barcode and last name.

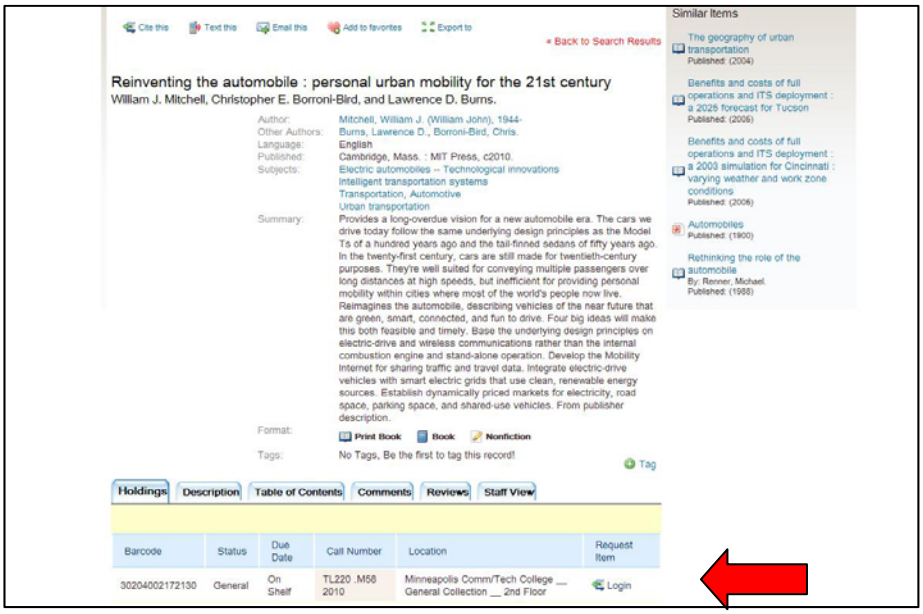
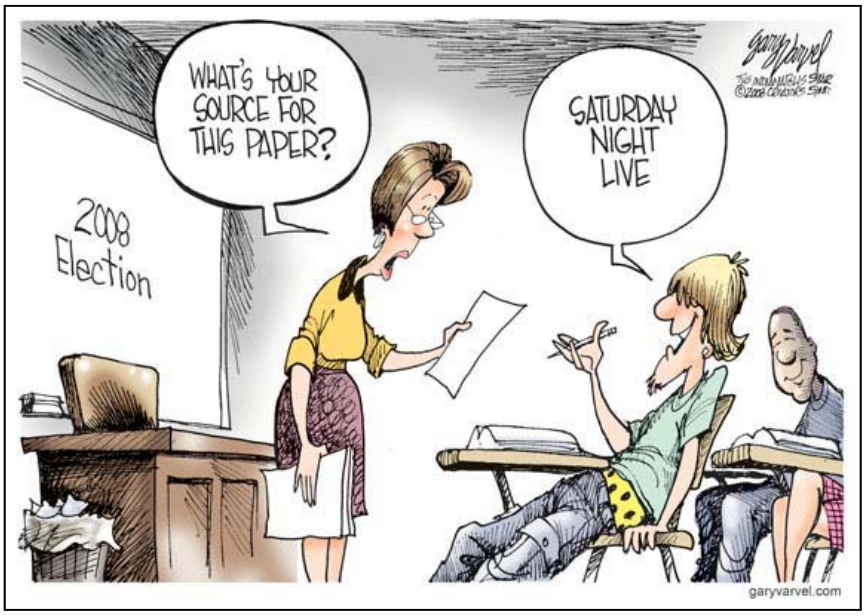


Fig. 3 Library Catalog login link to interlibrary loan a book

After logging in, click "Request". You should get an interlibrary loan form. Submit the form to receive an interlibrary loan confirmation.



Permission sought from The Indianapolis Star.

Note: Off-campus Access

When off-campus, you will be prompted to login for library databases. You must have a library-activated college ID card. 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 Anoka Technical College Library" section of the library website. For more assistance, stop by or call the library, 763-576-7850.

MORE HELP

Drop by the library or use the "Ask a Librarian" fill-in form on the library website!