1. CHOOSING A TOPIC

You should choose a topic that is interesting to you.

Keep in mind, however:

- your topic should not be too broad (e.g. The role of women in the plays of Shakespeare is probably too broad because hundreds of books and articles have been written on this topic);
- your topic should not be too narrow (e.g. The symbolism of Ariel’s costume in the Tempest is probably too narrow because you will probably not be able to find enough articles or books discussing this);
- a good rule of thumb to remember is this: if there are entire books written about your topic, it is too broad for a research paper; on the other hand, if your thesis can be fully discussed in a few paragraphs, your topic is too narrow.

Choose a topic and write it here: ____________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

2. DECIDING ON SEARCH TERMS

You should come up with as many terms as you can that are connected with your topic. These are your search terms.

- Use brainstorming techniques to come up with synonyms and alternative spellings, if any;
- you can find synonyms in a thesaurus, or after doing a preliminary search, look for other terminology or subject headings that are relevant to your topic;
- if you want to look at a text using a particular literary theory or frame (e.g. psychoanalysis, feminist criticism, postcolonialism) you can add terms related to this.

e.g. search terms you could use for the topic Female desire in Wuthering Heights from a feminist perspective might include female, woman, desire, sexuality, "wuthering heights," feminism, feminist

e.g. search terms you could use for the topic The theme of the underworld in Virgil’s Aeneid might include: underworld, hades, hell, aeneid, aeneas, virgil, vergil, otherworld (if you do a Subject search for underworld, CLIO gives you the cross-reference “See: Voyages to the otherworld”).

Write the search terms you’ll use for your topic here: __________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Try a variety of combinations of your search terms. You can find different endings (truncate your terms):
- use ? if you are searching in CLIO;
- use * if you are searching in other databases.

e.g. feminis? finds feminism, feminist, or feminists.
   sex* finds sex, sexuality, sexual, sextuplets, and all other words beginning with “sex”
3. GETTING AN OVERVIEW

A good encyclopedia article can get you started on your research by giving you an overview of the topic, and a bibliography of other books and articles that can lead to further scholarly resources.

Go to CLIO, the online catalog, on the library home page (library.barnard.edu) and do a Keyword Search to see if there is a useful encyclopedia article for background on your topic. Put in a search term, or an author’s last name, followed by the word “encyclopedia.”

e.g. for a paper on Chaucer, do a Keyword Search for chaucer encyclopedia
or use a broader subject area, like “african american” culture encyclopedia (remember to put quotes around a phrase in a Keyword search)
or try modernis? literature encyclopedia, for example

Search for an encyclopedia in CLIO that looks as if it might be useful for your topic and write down the title:

______________________________________________________________________________________

Location and call number: _________________________________________________________________

4. FINDING BOOKS USING CLIO

In CLIO, use your search terms to do some Keyword searches on your topic.

Find and list below three books that look useful for your topic:

A. Title ________________________________________________________________________________
   Author _______________________________________________________________________________

B. Title ________________________________________________________________________________
   Author _______________________________________________________________________________

C. Title ________________________________________________________________________________
   Author _______________________________________________________________________________

5. FINDING SCHOLARLY ARTICLES USING LIBRARY DATABASES

CLIO does not list individual articles within journals; for this, you need to consult a library database. The Databases are available via the tab on the library homepage and at wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/rti

- Use a keyword search to find citations for appropriate articles.
- If the article isn’t online in the database, click on “e-Link” in the record to find out if the article is available in a different database.
- If the article is not online, search by the journal’s title in CLIO to find out which library (if any) has it.

Some of the most useful databases for research in the humanities are:
- Humanities Full Text: covers scholarly periodicals in the humanities
- MLA Bibliography: the most comprehensive bibliography in literature (not full-text, but has e-Links)
- JSTOR: a journal storage database with articles from scholarly journals, dating back to their first issue, in many different disciplines
- Project Muse: a full-text database of articles from scholarly journals
- ProQuest: a multi-disciplinary database with articles from scholarly journals as well as newspapers
Go to either Humanities Full Text or MLA Bibliography (find them on the Databases list), and find a citation for one article relevant to your topic. Give the following information:

Title: __________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Author: ________________________________________________________________________________

Source/Journal: _________________________________________________________________________

Date and volume number: _________________________________________________________________

Does CLIO show that Barnard owns this journal? ___________

Why does this particular article seem promising? ________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

6. USING FIND ARTICLES

You can search databases individually, as above, or you can use Find Articles to search all the full-text databases at once. You can get to Find Articles from the Articles tab at the top of the library home page. However, Find Articles has limitations because it’s a full-text search.

Find a full-text article relevant to your topic using Find Articles and give the following information:

Title: __________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Author: ________________________________________________________________________________

Source/Journal: _________________________________________________________________________

Date and volume number: _________________________________________________________________

6. GOOGLE SCHOLAR

There are many useful Web sites on literature, and you can find them using a regular Google search, but you must be careful to ascertain whether they contain authoritative information, or junk.

Check for:
- the author's name, title, and affiliation (particularly .edu sites – but a site authored by a professor rather than an undergraduate, for example)
- scholarly language, and references to other scholars and research
- footnotes, or endnotes, references, a bibliography
- a lack of bias and advertising

By using Google Scholar, you can make sure you obtain only scholarly results.
- In Google Scholar, go to the Advanced Scholar Search, and set up your preferences, e.g. Show e-Link@Columbia, and import to RefWorks.

Carry out a Google Scholar search on your topic. Use the Advanced Scholar Search and limit to articles in the Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. How many results did you obtain?____________________
7. COMPARING SEARCH METHODS

The individual databases, Find Articles and Google Scholar all have pluses and minuses. Give one advantage and one disadvantage of each way of searching for articles:

1. **MLA or Humanities Full Text** (whichever of the two databases you tried)

   Advantage: ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   Disadvantage: ____________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________

2. **Find Articles**

   Advantage: ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   Disadvantage: ____________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________

3. **Google Scholar**

   Advantage: ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   Disadvantage: ____________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________

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