BARNARD LIBRARY
Research Skills Worksheet

Name: ____________________________________________                   Date: ________________
Instructor: __________________________________________________

1. CHOOSING A TOPIC

You should choose a topic that is interesting to you. 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 would 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.

Write your preliminary idea for a topic here: ____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

2. DECIDING WHAT SEARCH TERMS TO USE

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 (e.g. hell, hades, underworld) and alternative spellings (e.g. Vergil, Virgil).
• Look in a thesaurus for synonyms.
• After doing a preliminary search, look at the books and articles you found for other terminology related to your topic.
• If you want to look at a text using a particular literary theory, frame or lens (e.g. psychoanalytic, feminist, 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: woman, women, female, desire, sexuality, "wuthering heights," feminism, feminist.

Write some search terms for your topic here: ___________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Try different combinations of your search terms. Find different endings (truncate your terms) using the symbol *.

  e.g. feminis* finds feminism, feminist, or feminists.

3. GETTING AN OVERVIEW/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Reference books like encyclopedias 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 the First Year English guide at library.barnard.edu/find-books/guides/first-year-english and look at the list of reference books to see if there is a useful one for your topic.
- To find the location and call number for a print reference book, search in CLIO for it (clio.columbia.edu/catalog#)

Write down the title of a reference book, in print or online, that looks as if it might be useful for your topic: ____________________________________________

If it’s in print, what are the location and call number? ________________________________

4. FINDING BOOKS USING CLIO

In CLIO, do some keyword (All Fields) searches in the Catalog for some books relevant to your topic.

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

The most useful databases for First Year English research are listed on the First Year English guide at library.barnard.edu/find-books/guides/first-year-english (under “Finding Articles”).

Using either Humanities Full Text or MLA Bibliography, find a citation for one article relevant to your topic. Give the following information:

Title: __________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Author: __________________________________________________________________________
Source/Journal: ___________________________________________________________________
Date and volume number: __________________________________________________________
Why does this particular article seem useful for your topic? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

6. USING THE ARTICLES SEARCH IN CLIO

You can search databases individually, as above, or you can search all of the full-text databases simultaneously using the Articles search in CLIO at clio.columbia.edu/articles#.

Find an article relevant to your topic using the Articles search in CLIO, and give the following information:

Title: __________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Author: __________________________________________________________________________
Source/Journal: ___________________________________________________________________
Date and volume/issue number: _____________________________________________________
6. GOOGLE SCHOLAR

Scholar.google.com will find only scholarly books and articles.
To enable e-Link@Columbia in Google Scholar, go to Settings (by clicking on the down arrow at the top right), and then on “Library Links”. Search for Columbia University and check the box.

Carry out a Google Scholar search on your topic. How many results do you find? ___________
Use the Advanced search by clicking on the down arrow at the top in the search bar, and select “Where my words occur in the title of the article.” How many results do you find? ___________

7. COMPARING ARTICLE SEARCH METHODS

The individual databases, the Articles search 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. Articles search in CLIO

Advantage: _____________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Disadvantage: ____________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

3. Google Scholar

Advantage: _____________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Disadvantage: ____________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________