Conducting Scholarly Research
HEED 418 – Current Issues in Health

The objective of the questions below is to guide you through the research process to sharpen your existing skills and acquire new ones to assist with your class assignments. The skills you apply in answering these questions will not only be useful for you to successfully complete assignments, but will be applicable in the workplace and in your personal life. Whether writing a paper, making a conference presentation, or purchasing a car, mastering the steps of the research process will serve you well.

Step 1. Selecting a Research Topic

There are literally thousands of methods for selecting a topic – from drawing on what you’ve learned in your class and your textbook to browsing periodicals, books, and websites such as those found on the Library’s Health & Physical Education Subject Guide (http://libguides.frostburg.edu/heed)

Exercise: What is your research topic? For today’s exercise, let’s start with the topic Obesity in the United States

Step 2. Conduct an Initial Search to Find Background Information

Before completely committing to your topic, you should conduct some background reading. In addition to gaining some basic knowledge, background reading can help you gather key ideas and terminology that will assist you in finding further sources to complete your research. The sources listed in Step 1 are an excellent place to start.

It is also important in this step of the process to make sure that you can find enough information on your topic to complete your research or assignment. Conducting an initial search for information is an important step to conduct before committing to a final topic focus; major topic revisions should be made early in the process. You might also find that there is too much information on a topic and the sources you browse in initial searches may provide ideas for you to narrow or focus your research topic.

Since you are required to use books and scholarly and professional journal articles, you will need to utilize the Library’s resources to locate these information sources.

Exercise: Conduct a search on the topic identified Step 1 using the Library’s OneSearch (see “Using OneSearch” at http://libguides.frostburg.edu/heed to assist you in answering the following questions):

➢ What Search Terms/Keywords did you use?

➢ How many results did you find?

➢ How many results from academic journals?

➢ How many results from books?
Step 3. Locate Books on your Topic

Books are an excellent source of both background and in-depth information on a topic; they are especially useful in providing historical overviews. Searching for information in books often requires keeping your topic broad.

Exercise: Find books on the topic you searched in Step 2.

- Limit your OneSearch results to Books available in the Frostburg State University Library. How many books are available at FSU?

Find a Book located in the Frostburg State University Library Stacks and complete the following information:

- Book Title:
- Book Author(s):
- Place Publication/Publisher:
- Book Call Number:
- Is it on the Shelf?

Find an E-Book from your OneSearch Results and complete the following information:

- Book Title:
- Book Author(s):
- Place Publication/Publisher:
- Is the Full-Text of the Book Available?

Step 4. Focus your Topic – Prepare to Locate Journal Articles

Searching for journal articles – or for information on the web – can be a daunting task if your topic is too broad, such as “Obesity in the United States.” There is the possibility of getting lost in the hundreds of thousands of academic journal results available through OneSearch.

Exercise: Select a particular aspect of “Obesity in the United States” in order to narrow or focus your research – and, to retrieve a more reasonable number of journal articles. Possibilities include populations (male, female, children, adults, etc.), programs (physical education, personal training, sports, etc.), and nutrition among many others. Hint: The subject headings located in the within your initial OneSearch results are a great source of ideas!

- What is the new focus of your topic?
Conduct a search on your new topic using OneSearch and answer the following questions:

- What Search Terms/Keywords did you use?
- How many results did you find?
- How many results from academic journals?
- How many results from books?
- Are you satisfied with your results? Why or why not? If not, what additional topic revision(s) would you make?

Step 5. Identify & Locate Relevant Journal Articles

Articles are published in many types of periodicals, including newspapers, magazines, trade journals, and scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals (see “What is a Scholarly Journal or Scholarly Article?” at http://libguides.frostburg.edu/heed for definitions of each). Articles from all of these publication types are available through the Library’s OneSearch.

Scholarly (also known as peer-reviewed or refereed) articles are written by researchers, faculty, or students and are published in research or academic journals. They have a high level of credibility because they have been put through a rigorous system of review – other experts in the author’s field check the article for accuracy and to ensure that it meets the research standards of that subject area. Because scholarly articles represent high-quality research and rigorous review, be sure to include them in your research.

Exercise: Find scholarly articles on your revised topic (from Step 4).

- Limit your OneSearch results to Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Articles. How many results did you find?
- Limit your results to articles published from 2005 to the present. How many results did you find?

Browse through your results to identify articles you might use in preparing for a presentation or writing a paper on this topic. Select what you believe to be a particularly relevant article (focused on your topic) and complete the following information:

- Article Title:
- Article Author(s):
- Name of Article Source/Journal:
- List 3 reasons why you selected this particular article for potential use in a presentation or paper:
  1.
  2.
  3.
Step 6. Read & Evaluate the Information You Find.

Search tools like OneSearch and Google can retrieve information for you quickly – often too much information. When you retrieve too much information, you can use the skills you applied in answering the questions above to focus your topic and get a handle on the number of results you retrieve. You can also browse titles, authors, subject headings, and abstracts to identify relevant books, articles, and websites that might help you with completing your class assignments.

Despite the skills you now possess as an information seeker, one fact remains a constant – you need to read and evaluate the information you find to (1) determine if it is truly useful to apply to your research project and (2) to further add to your knowledge on the topic. While the latter – including evaluating the content of a book, article, or website – is a part of your coursework, there are some basic factors to consider when evaluating the appropriateness of information to your research and assignments.

Exercise: Use the [find it] button (or Full-Text indicator) to access the full-text of one of the articles in your OneSearch results. Make sure you select an article that you think you could use in writing a paper or preparing a presentation on the topic.

Browse the contents of the article and complete the following information:

- Article Title:
- Article Author(s):
- Name of Article Source/Journal:
- What are the author(s) qualifications? Institutional affiliation(s)?
- What is the article’s purpose, or scope? Is the topic given in-depth treatment?
- Who is the intended audience of the article?
- Does the information presented appear to be current?
- Is there a bibliography or end-notes?
- Is this a scholarly article? Why?
- Would you be comfortable incorporating this article into your own research? Why or Why not?

If your answer to the last question is “yes,” then you will need to further evaluate the content for accuracy, verifiability, objectivity, and value. You will be using the knowledge you are gaining in your coursework, and possibly discussions with your professor and classmates, to reach a final conclusion as to the value of a resource.
Step 7. Cite Your Sources.

It is very important to cite the sources you use in your research in order give credit to those whose work you have used to further develop your understanding of the topic. It also allows for readers of your work to find additional information.

Proper incorporation of your sources into your research paper and presentation is also a means of demonstrating the knowledge you have gained on the topic through your awareness of existing studies and research. The level of understanding you have of the topic is likely to be directly reflected in the level of success you have in relevant activities as a practitioner in the field.

Exercise: Use the Cite tool in OneSearch to create a citation in APA Format. Write the citation below:

Step 8. Use the Information in Your Assignment(s).

Once you have found enough information to prepare your presentation or write your paper, you will be incorporating your sources into your work. There are many ways to accomplish this. Here are some examples:

- Use evidence from an article to support a point you are trying to make in your paper.
- Use evidence from an article that opposed your point of view to illustrate that there are varying opinions on the topic. Your job is to demonstrate why that point of view is wrong.
- Use several articles to show what scholars generally think about your topic, including differences.
- Use several articles to show types of programs being conducted on the topic and the various success of each.
- Use the information you have found to identify areas for further research or programmatic/curricular development.