The Research Process

Soup to nuts
Start with a topic

• If the topic you have is broad or you don’t have a good sense of what you want to do with it, start with a general resource:
  • Wikipedia
  • Encyclopedias
  • [Your Topic] for Dummies
Notice anything about those sources?

• They are not (generally) scholarly and should not appear as resources for your paper
• They should only be used to gain background knowledge to inform the rest of the search process
• Learn basic terminology and common themes/questions in that field
Now you have a basic idea...

Start with books- searching for them will give you more of an ideas about:

• More targeted keywords
• Specific subject headings
• Prominent authors in the field
• Ways to craft and direct your research
Time to dig deeper...

• Now we need to look for articles from scholarly sources.
• These are organized by subject terms, which you found in the last step
• Articles are more narrow in focus, and may have more current data
Are you taking notes about what you find?

- Use RefWorks to keep track of your sources
- Keep a research log in necessary
- These steps are not linear- keep going back over them again and again until you think you have enough to start organizing your paper
- Consider an annotated bibliography
Esoteric places to look

• Dissertations and theses
  – People writing these have done the research for you
  – You might be surprised at what you find...

• Web of Science
  – If you have an article, this database can see if others have used it as a reference- think of this as a forward-driven bibliography
Last resort

• Internet
  – I know, anyone can post stuff there
• But now you have done all that background work, use it
• Limit by domain: [site:census.gov]
• Use the same search strategy to find what you need, not simply what appears first
Now what?

• After all that information gathering, start to write.
• Visit the Writing Center for help with this
• ...if you haven’t been doing that all along, that is. That’s what they’re here for- to help with this whole research process