**STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC**

**SUMMARY:** State your topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?" Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question.

**STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY:** Use your keywords to search in the index of subject encyclopedias or on the Internet. Read articles in these encyclopedias and online to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

**STEP 3: USE CATALOGS TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA**

**SUMMARY:** Use keyword searching in the catalog to find materials by topic or subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the location information (call number). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject; they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area.

**STEP 4: USE DATABASES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES**

**SUMMARY:** Use periodical databases to find articles. Choose the databases best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk if you need help figuring out which database will be best.

**STEP 5: FIND INTERNET RESOURCES**

**SUMMARY:** Use [search engines](http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/search.html). Check to see if your class has a [bibliography or research guide](http://guides.library.cornell.edu/) created by librarians.

**STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND**

**SUMMARY:** See the library tutorial on [Evaluating Websites](http://www.spu.edu/depts/library/online_tutorials/evaluating_websites.html).

If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. Check with a reference librarian or your instructor.

**STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT**

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources.

Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references.

Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism.