

BARNARD LIBRARY
Library Research Skills Worksheet
<http://www.barnard.edu/library/courses/LibraryExercise.pdf>

Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

This worksheet will help you to start investigating your research paper topic, and improve your research skills. If you have any difficulty, remember that the reference librarians are available to assist you in your search, and can be reached at 212-854-3953, or by e-mail at redesk@barnard.edu.

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* - 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* - 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

§ Write down 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

§ e.g. search terms for the topic *The theme of the underworld in Virgil's Aeneid* might be: **underworld, hades, hell, aeneid, aeneas, virgil, vergil**

Write the search terms for your topic here: _____

3. GETTING AN OVERVIEW

A good encyclopedia article can get you started on your research by giving you
\$ an **overview** of the topic
\$ a **bibliography** of other books and articles

Go to **CLIO**, the online catalog, to find encyclopedias by doing a **Keyword Search**.
Put in a search term followed by the words “and encyclopedia.”
You can also use an author’s last name followed by “and encyclopedia.”

\$ e.g. for a paper on Chaucer, do a Keyword Search for **chaucer and encyclopedia**
\$ or use a broader subject area, like **women and literature and encyclopedia**
or “**medieval england**” **and encyclopedia** (remember to put quotes around a phrase in a Keyword Search)

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

Location and call number: _____

Find the encyclopedia in the library and write down the title and the author (if it is signed) of one relevant **article** in this encyclopedia:

Title: _____

Author: _____

Does the article have a bibliography? Yes _____ No _____

4. FINDING BOOKS USING CLIO

\$ You can search CLIO by **Title, Author, Subject** or **Keyword**
\$ There is CLIO search help available online; click on the “**Help**” button at the top of the search screen
\$ Use the search terms you listed above to do some **Keyword** or **Subject Searches**

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

a. Title _____

Author _____

b. Title _____

Author _____

c. Title _____

Author _____

5. FINDING BOOKS AND ARTICLES USING A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sometimes there is a bibliography, or pre-selected list of books and articles, related to your topic.

Bibliographies can be useful because

§ the books and articles have been chosen because they are good sources

§ they can help you to find additional books and articles that may not be in online databases.

Find author bibliographies in CLIO by doing a **Subject Search** for the author's name and going down the list of subdivisions until you come to the subdivision "--bibliography":

§ e.g. **hawthorne nathaniel 1804-1864 -- bibliography**

You can also do a **Guided Keyword** search and specify that the words must occur in the Subject field:

§ e.g. **hamlet bibliography, all of these, in Subject**

Write down the title of one bibliography in CLIO that looks as if it might be useful (if there is one):

Location and call number: _____

6. FINDING ARTICLES USING INDEXES AND DATABASES

CLIO does not list individual articles within journals; for this, you need to consult an **index or database**.

§ After using a Keyword search to find a citation for an appropriate article in an index or database, click on "**e-link**" in the record to find out if the article is available online

§ If the article is not online, go to CLIO and search by the journal's title to find out which library, if any, has it.

The indexes are available on the list of Databases on the library homepage at

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/databases>

Two of the most useful indexes for research in the humanities are:

§ **Humanities Full Text**: covers scholarly periodicals in the humanities (from 1984 to the present)

§ **MLA Bibliography**: the most comprehensive bibliography in literature (from 1963 to the present)

Find a citation for one article relevant to your topic in Humanities Full Text or MLA Bibliography and 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? _____

7. FINDING ARTICLES USING FULL-TEXT JOURNAL DATABASES

Some databases on the list of Databases on the library home page are primarily full-text - that is, they contain full text journals and magazines.

§ **JSTOR**: a database of articles from over 320 scholarly journals on anthropology, economics, education, finance, history, literature, mathematics, philosophy, political science, etc.

§ **ProQuest Direct**: articles and citations for articles from scholarly journals as well as newspapers and magazines.

Find one full-text article on your topic from JSTOR or ProQuest and give the following information:

Title: _____

Author: _____

Source/Journal: _____

Date and volume number: _____

8. FILLING IN GAPS IN YOUR RESEARCH USING THE WEB

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

Check for:

§ the **author's name and title** - for example, look for a Website authored by a professor rather than an undergraduate

§ **scholarly language**, and references to other scholars and research

§ a useful **bibliography**

§ a lack of **bias** and **advertising**

In the section "Finding Information on the World Wide Web" on the First Year English research page (<http://www.barnard.edu/library/courses/Spring2005/BC1201.htm>), click on either **Online Literary Criticism Collection** or **Voice of the Shuttle**.

By following links on the site you have chosen, locate a literary Website or article that is relevant to your topic, and comes from a scholarly source. Write down its URL:
