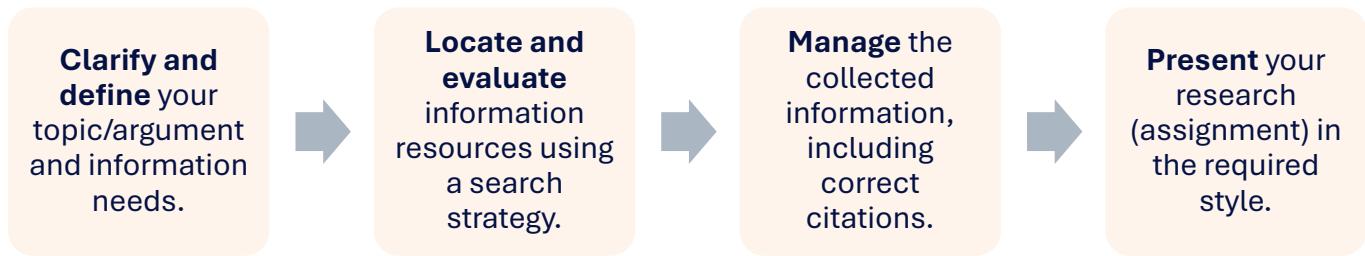


# Researching a Topic

Be strategic about researching, it will save you hours of time. Try the following:



## Step 1: Clarify and define your topic

Know what you're searching for before you start.

- Check meanings of words/re-write topic or quote
- Circle instructional words
- Underline the key words and check for synonyms e.g. (rural or regional or remote)
- Bracket the limiting words
- Divide the topic into sections
- <https://studyskills.federation.edu.au/assessment/topic-analysis/> gives an excellent overview on topic analysis.

## Step 2: Locate and evaluate information resources

An **effective search strategy** will save time and give you a greater sense of control over the research process. A good search strategy is flexible - be prepared to review and refine your search strategy as you go according to the results and information you find.

<https://studyskills.federation.edu.au/student-skills/how-to-research/> gives an excellent overview of the research process.

The **Subject Guides** available from the Library homepage or at <https://libguides.federation.edu.au/> suggests starting points for research, including specific reference titles, databases and recommended websites. Also, make good use of any texts and readings your lecturers have recommended.

## Searching techniques: Putting your search terms together

Here are some techniques you can use to specify exactly what you're looking for:

Link terms with <b>AND</b>	Search for articles that include all of the terms entered - required by many databases e.g. <i>business AND consumers AND ethics</i>
Link terms with <b>OR</b>	Search for articles that include at least one of the terms entered; often used for alternative terms. e.g. <i>elderly OR aged</i>



Find this helpsheet online  
[studyskills.federation.edu.au](http://studyskills.federation.edu.au)

Link terms with <b>NOT</b>	Exclude the irrelevant term from the search results. e.g. <i>photography</i> not <i>digital</i> You should use NOT selectively so it doesn't hinder your results.
<b>truncation</b>	Search for variations of a word by shortening it to its root. e.g. <i>teach*</i> searches for <i>teach</i> , <i>teacher</i> , <i>teaching</i> , <i>teaches</i>
<b>"phrase searching"</b>	Form a single concept made up of multiple words using quotation marks e.g. " <i>Australian Institute of Sport</i> " will have very different results to <i>Australian</i> and <i>institute</i> and <i>sport</i>

**Combining** your keywords and concepts using these techniques creates a very refined search statement, a bit like an algebraic equation, e.g.

**"health care" AND nurs\* AND (aged OR elderly) NOT dementia**

## Recording searches

Conducting a comprehensive search on a topic takes time so it is a good idea to record your search history to keep track of where you are up to. This will allow you to search efficiently and effectively and to identify any gaps in your research. As you search you may need to modify your search strategy, e.g. remove a concept if you are getting too few results or add a concept if you are getting too many. Record which resources you have searched, the search terms and any limiters used, and the number of relevant citations retrieved.

 Use a template like this to record your search history				
Title of source searched	Dates covered	Search terms used	No. items found	No. relevant citations
Australian Public Affairs Full Text	1970-current	youth AND suicide AND (rural OR regional)	35	33

## Evaluating the information found

Not all information is equal or reliable, especially on the internet. Ask yourself:

- **Current:** When was it published? How old are the references and data used? Has this source, or its data, been updated? Does this type of information get updated? Is there likely to be more recent information available elsewhere?
- **Relevant:** Is this information relevant to your assignment? Is there likely to be better information? Is this aimed at the correct audience?
- **Authority:** Who wrote it? What are their qualifications? Where do they work? Who do they work for? Are they likely to have a good understanding of this field?
- **Accurate:** Is the information reliable? Can you find the original source? What is the quality of the presentation? Are there significant errors? Do the conclusions match the data? Have all sides been considered?



- **Purpose:** Why has the article been written? Is there any obvious bias? Is the author or their employer likely to get a benefit out of the recommendations? Is it recommending a particular course of action or therapy? Does the data support this? Are any alternatives considered?

## Step 3: Manage the information collected

### Recording citations as soon as you find them

Develop a system for recording and keeping track of your references, print and online, so that you have all the necessary information when you need to compile a reference list. Having to backtrack to find missing details is a time waster. You may find it useful to use **EndNote**, a web-based program that stores your references and automatically generates a reference list in the required citation style. For more information on EndNote Web see <https://libguides.federation.edu.au/endnoteweb>

### Citing sources used

You have an ethical and legal responsibility to acknowledge all information sources used, whether quoting or paraphrasing. Fedcite at <https://federation.edu.au/library/student-resources/fedcite> is the referencing tool that you should use too. It is available from the Library's homepage.

## Step 4: Present your research

Before you hand in your research or assignment, carefully re-read the assessment criteria and use it as a checklist to make sure you have understood and completed the required task. Check that your citations are referenced correctly as penalties apply for plagiarism. Proofread your writing for spelling and grammatical errors. Speak to a learning skills advisor or student academic leader at anytime during the writing process. See them at the ASK desk in the Library or the Writing Space or online at <https://federation.edu.au/current-students/learning-and-study/get-help-on-campus/learning-skills-advisors>



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