Getting Started

The research process does not have to be an intimidating or overwhelming experience. Implementing a few basic research techniques can help you overcome various obstacles you might encounter when conducting research. These techniques include developing a research question or statement, completing a search strategy, and documenting your research using a search log.

Developing a Research Question/Statement

In order to develop a research question or statement, researchers often start out with a general topic. After selecting a general topic, you will then decide what details about the topic you want to explore:

- General topic example:
  - Diabetes
- Details about general topic:
  - Type II diabetes
  - Children with diabetes
  - Causes of diabetes
  - Treatment of diabetes
  - Diabetes prevention

Now that you have your research topic selected, you will need to create a research question or statement.

Analytical paper:

- Unbiased approach to a topic and might start with a research question. For example:
  - Are children who drink sugary sodas at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes?
- Purpose is to answer a research question
- Impartial analysis of a topic supported by authoritative sources

Argumentative paper:

- Slightly biased approach to a topic and might start with a research statement. For example:
  - Sugary sodas cause Type II diabetes in children
- Purpose is to argue a side or opinion on a topic
- Use fact-based research from authoritative sources to support your side or opinion
- Write a thoughtful argument to convince a reader your side or opinion is correct

Search Strategy
Before beginning a search in a database, especially for journal articles, conduct a search strategy. You need to develop a game plan on how to proceed with your database search. You cannot type your research question or statement into a single database search box, since the database does not process large questions or statements efficiently. Keep in mind: you are not conducting a general Internet search; you are searching in a database for academic sources. You have to break your question or statement down into key terms/subjects. Then you can create search statements to input into the database search boxes. The more strategic you are in conducting your search, the better your search results will be.

**Search Log**

It is important to document your research as you search for journal articles in various databases. The search log will help you keep track of the databases searched, search terms used, and journal articles located. As you conduct a search in a database, simply log the pertinent information about your search and your results. You can use this data to quickly locate articles if you did not print them, if you lost them, or if you want to run the search again at a later date to determine if additional articles were published on your topic. Finally, the information documented on the search log can help you quickly complete the reference citations for the reference list.

**Literature Review:** Reading, Analyzing, & Annotating the sources on your topic

After you finish your research, begin reading the books, journal articles, Internet articles, and other sources you found to gather information on your topic. It is NOT appropriate to simply skim the material or ONLY read the abstract. Allow yourself ample time to read the material you wish to use as a source. You should understand the main concepts and findings in the source. For example, if you are reading a journal article, read the entire article and make notes about key concepts and findings. After you read the article, review your notes and then write an annotation (summary note) for the article, make sure to include your thoughts about the content or the way the content was presented. This is your opportunity to critically analyze the content of the journal article and explain why it is relevant to your research project. Finally, construct your reference citation—APA Style is required at St. Petersburg College (HEC campus)!

**Reference List**

Once you complete your literature review and select sources to use in your research paper, go ahead and start your reference list. You can also complete your reference list as you cite a source in the body of your paper. The trick is to complete your reference list as you go; add sources to your reference list as you review and select sources, or as you cite them in your paper while writing. This way you will have your sources organized and be ahead of the game. Avoid completing your reference list at the last minute after you finish writing your research paper; this can cause you a significant hardship, especially if you misplace a source or you forget to add a source to the reference page.