Research skills

1. **Read the assignment sheet** carefully when it is first given to you. Look for words such as ‘compare’, ‘evaluate’, ‘discuss’, ‘analyse’, as these will determine how you should approach your assignment. Do you understand what the lecturer is asking you to do? If you are unsure, ask.

2. **Decide on your topic.** Look for resources on the topic you have chosen. Use the SACOTC Library catalogue, MCD Cat and the Discovery layer before approaching the Web. Remember that SACOTC students have reciprocal borrowing rights with other MCD libraries.

   Perhaps the topic is too broad or too narrow to effectively research with the resources available to you. Don’t be afraid to change topic or to ask if you can address a more specific area within the topic.

3. **Start to research.** Do some general reading – use subject dictionaries, encyclopaedias and even atlases, which can be found in the reference and folio sections. These books can help your understanding of the terminology of the topic and allow you to identify key components, people and places. Then use a range of resources - books, journal articles, Google Scholar, Web pages - to find information relating to the particular subject you are researching. Don’t limit yourself to the paragraphs with the precise information you are looking for. Reading to put the subject into context will give you a better understanding of the topic, and this will assist you when you are writing your assignment, but don’t lose your focus: only take notes on the information that will target your response to the assignment “question”\(^1\). Ensure the resources you use are suitable as sources of information. See Turabian p.33\(^2\), for more information.

   Use the subject headings associated with titles in the Library catalogues to expand your searches, or refer to the Library of Congress subject heading list (available via the link on the Library home page) to get you started. The bibliographies at the end of books and journal articles can also be useful for directing your research. Follow links from trustworthy Web pages.

   If you find a book that looks like it might be useful and you would like to be able to access it through the SACOTC Library, ask the Librarian if it can be purchased, or borrowed from another library via interlibrary loan.

   For general research assistance, ask the Librarian or see Badke\(^3\), who offers a comprehensive guide to researching library catalogues, journal databases and the Web, including Google Scholar, as well as information on choosing a topic and reading for research.

4. **Take notes as you go.** Make sure you record where your notes are taken from and use inverted commas to identify text copied exactly from the source. You may not use these words as quotes in your assignment, but it helps you to avoid inadvertently plagiarising. Note the following information from the different sources for use in your citations and bibliography:

   **Books:**
   - Author(s) and/or editor(s),
   - Title (including subtitle),
   - Edition, if applicable,
   - Volume no., if applicable,
   - Publisher,
   - Place and date of publication,
   - Page nos.

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For full details on citing specific types of sources, see *Turabian*, Chapter 17, p. 164. *Turabian* is the style guide officially adopted by the University of Divinity:


There are two possible styles for citing the resources used. SACOTC has adopted the Bibliography style. For help with the preparation of citations, you may use the free online basic Endnote resource, available here: [https://www.myendnoteweb.com/EndNoteWeb.html](https://www.myendnoteweb.com/EndNoteWeb.html). Alternatively, use the citation overview sheet available from the Librarian.

When writing a research paper, it is essential that you acknowledge the source of any quotes, facts and figures, illustrations, or ideas you incorporate into your paper. This is called referencing, which is a standardised method of acknowledging the information you have obtained from both published and unpublished works. This information may be in the form of words taken directly from another piece of work, in which case the text must be acknowledged by the use of inverted commas; in the reproduction of a diagram, chart or picture; or in the more general expression of an idea or concept which is not your own.

References, or citations as they are otherwise known, enable the information contained in your paper to be verified. If you do not use citations to acknowledge the use of another author’s work, you are plagiarising. Plagiarism is taken very seriously by the academic world and plagiarists will face repercussions.

**5. Prepare a draft paper.** You will need an introduction, topic paragraphs and a conclusion. If you are unsure about the processes involved in creating an academic paper, refer to the following resources:

1. For help with sentence construction and general grammar, see *Turabian*, Chapter 11, p111;
2. For information on how to form paragraphs, [http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/paragraphs/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/paragraphs/) is useful;
3. For basic information on how to research, prepare a draft and write an essay, see *How to write a great research paper*[^4]. For more in-depth information, see *Greetham*[^5].

It’s important, at this stage, to read the assignment sheet again, to ensure that you are addressing the requirements exactly. Check the style of writing required – sub-headings or essay format, for example. Check your word count and make adjustments as necessary. If you are short on words, see where you could add more content to enhance the assignment, don’t just pad it out.

Proof read twice for content, grammar and spelling, making adjustments as required. Taking a break between readings can be helpful: it’s surprising what you miss the first time around.

Ensure your citations are complete and accurate. Prepare your reference list and/or bibliography. The latter will contain not only the titles you have cited, but also any other resources you have read during the research process.

Submit your paper.