



Writing Center
Academic Affairs

Tips on Searching for Sources

If you have limited time (2 weeks or less):

1. Write your topic in the form of a question. For example, “Does video game violence affect children’s behavior?”
2. Pick out the main topic keywords of your question. For example, “Does video game violence affect children’s behavior?”
3. Find the appropriate UHCL Library Course Guide for your topic here: https://uhcl.libguides.com/sb.php?subject_id=53469 (use the drop-down to find a subject if the specific course is not listed).
4. Use a subject-specific database to search for your keywords.
5. Narrow the results to peer-reviewed and “open access” or “full text only”.
6. Read the abstracts to find articles that seem relevant to your topic.
7. Download double the required number of articles. If you need at least three articles, for example, download at least six.
8. Read through the articles entirely and pick the best ones for your assignment.
9. Don’t be afraid to change your topics or keywords as you search! Look for synonyms if you are not finding what you need in your articles. For example: children OR adolescents OR youth
10. The above steps can be repeated as many times as necessary until you have enough material to support your assignment.

If you have more than 2 weeks:

Alternate your time between finding sources and reading and writing notes so you don't burn out.

Picking your topic:

- Decide on topic categories (keywords) for your search before you begin. It might be helpful to write your topic in the form of a question.
- Think of related words and synonyms for your keywords to help you in your search. For example: **smoking OR cigarettes**

Searching for sources:

- Decide which types of works you will look for: interviews, articles, research studies, reviews, etc. Begin with a broad list and then eliminate as you narrow your topic.
- Locate databases that are relevant to your topic. You can use the UHCL Library Course Guides: https://uhcl.libguides.com/sb.php?subject_id=53469
- If you can't find a full text of a work freely accessible through the database, request it through interlibrary loan. Most requests take 24-48 hours. <https://uhcl.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/illiad.dll>
- Bibliography mining: once you find a few good articles, check their bibliography/reference pages to see which of their sources may be useful for you as well.

Additional sources (not peer-reviewed):

- Reference works, such as encyclopedias and textbooks, can be good sources depending on your discipline and assignment requirements.
- Look in the UHCL library or second-hand bookstores for used copies of older books that may be out of print.
- Don't forget doctoral dissertations as sources of current research.

Organizing your sources:

- Record a citation for each source using the documentation style appropriate to your field to save time later on.
- Expand acronyms or abbreviations when you write down citations so you don't have to look up full names later.
- Write brief descriptive notes for each article you read. Writing these will help you remember each article and decide whether you will be able to use it in your text.