Research Basics

1. Find a topic that interests you.
   ▶ Check assignment details from your professor.
   ▶ Ask a librarian for topic ideas related to your interests.
   ▶ Go to the research topic idea generator @ http://www.lib.odu.edu/libassist/idea/index.php

   **TOPIC IDEA EXAMPLE:**
   You are stunned by a Texas Department of Transportation statistic on *drunk driving*:
   “Texas continues to lead the nation when it comes to alcohol-related traffic fatalities. In 2007, 1,485 people died in alcohol-related crashes on Texas roadways.”
   Holiday 2008 *Don’t Drink & Drive* Public Education Campaign
   Texas Department of Transportation

2. Select a realistic aspect of the topic to cover.
   ▶ Target a time period or geographical area.
   ▶ Explore a viewpoint or group affected.
   ▶ Consider a specific problem, issue, or trend.

   **FOCUSING TOPIC EXAMPLES:**
   “Drunk Driving on West Road”
   Too narrow a topic
   “Preventing Teen Drunk Driving”
   Workable topic
   “Drunk Driving”
   Too broad a topic

3. Pick important topic word(s) or phrase(s) to use with search tools.
   ▶ Start searching with 1 - 3 words or phrases separated by “and”
   ▶ Use “quotes” to find specific phrases (see example below).
   ▶ Increase the number of search words or phrases to limit results.
   ▶ Decrease the number of search words or phrases to expand results.
   ▶ Check spelling if no results found.

   **SEARCH EXAMPLE:**
   “drunk driving” and teenagers

4. Choose the kind of information needed to support the topic.

   **INFORMATION TYPE EXAMPLES:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overviews</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encyclopedia about alcohol abuse &amp; teens</td>
<td>Government study about the numbers of teen drinkers in car accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Studies</td>
<td>News Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal article on risk-taking behavior of teens</td>
<td>Newspaper story on teens that drink alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accounts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews of alcohol counselors working with teens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on back
5. Identify important search tools to find reliable information.

SEARCH RESULT EXAMPLES:
Search “drunk driving and teenagers” via:

Research Database such as ProQuest @ http://www.lonestar.edu/library/14629.htm

- Find research by experts and legal issues in the news:
  - Acceptance of and Engagement in Risky Driving Behaviors by Teenagers (journal article)
  - Many Under 21 Drive Under the Influence (newspaper story)

Library Catalog @ http://library.lonestar.edu/hip/nhmc.htm

- Find real world examples, interviews, and facts:
  - Safe Road Home: Stop Your Teen from Drinking & Driving (includes book and DVD)
  - Party at Gregg's (CBS News DVD on parents allowing alcohol at teen parties)

Government Search Engine @ http://www.google.com/unclesam

- Find statistics and government studies:
  - Impaired Driving Facts from http://www.cdc.gov/

6. Find and evaluate information.

- Select items that use reliable sources that support your topic viewpoint.
- Check if authors provide sources for information they list in books, web sites, etc.
- Check several sources to see if they give a new and unique perspective on the topic.
- Use a mix of sources that include statistics and research to provide substantial support.
- Save time by asking librarians for help if you cannot find what you need.
- Request materials from other libraries at the reference desk or via the library catalog.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE:

The “Teenage Drunk Driving” web page at http://www.firsteagle.com/tdd.htm (an insurance company) includes statistics, but in most cases, doesn’t cite the source of the data. To be credible, statistics cited should list a reputable source.

7. Cite sources correctly.

- Keep a list of sources as you gather information.
- Ask your professor what citation style he/she prefers.
- Use the citation guides @ http://www.lonestar.edu/library/citation-help.htm.


Sober Thoughts on Drinking and Driving. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 1992. Videocassette.