

Research Tips

Indian Hills Community College

Search Strategies

- **Identify and develop the topic**
- **Find background information**
- **Check the card catalog**
- **Investigate on-line databases**
- **Find Internet sources**
- **Evaluate your sources**
- **Properly cite your sources**

Search strategies

Identify and develop the topic.

State the topic as a question, for instance, “Is stem cell research ethical?” or “Under what circumstances should stem cell research be permitted?” Identify key words or concepts in your question.

Find background information.

Look up keywords in the indexes of subject encyclopedias, and read the articles to set the context for the research. Note relevant terms in bibliographies at the end of the articles. Dictionaries, textbooks, class notes and reserve readings can also be helpful, depending on the topic.

Check the card catalog.

The IHCC Library card catalog is available online 24/7/365. The URL address for the card catalog is: <http://library.ihcc.cc.ia.us/>

Use subject headings to locate books and other materials on the college card catalog, which allows setting limits to refine and expand searches for materials. Write down the call number for the needed items so you can get them off the shelf.

Investigate online databases.

EbscoHost, Electric Library, and other online databases can be used to find citations and full-text articles on your topic using a keyword or subject heading search. Access to a number of databases are available from the Indian Hills Community College Library.

Bookmarks with user ID codes and passwords for remote access are available in the library. No password is needed if you are connected to the IHCC computer network. The Readers Guide and other print indexes are available in the library.

Find Internet sources.

Use search engines such as [Google \(www.google.com\)](http://www.google.com) or [Ask Jeeves \(www.ask.com\)](http://www.ask.com), or subject directories such as [Yahoo \(www.yahoo.com\)](http://www.yahoo.com) to locate information on your topic.

Evaluate your sources.

Use the criteria listed elsewhere in this brochure to evaluate the sources for authority, accuracy, and currency. If you have too many, or not enough sources, you may need to limit or expand your search criteria.

Properly cite your sources.

To avoid plagiarism be sure to document all resources. Keep track of where all information comes from and give proper credit where it is due. Refer to the citation portion of this brochure for more information on citing works using MLA and APA formats.

Citing Resources

Your instructors will usually require you to use either the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA) format for your works cited.

Sample MLA format for books.

Silver, Lee M. Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World. New York: Avon Books. 1997.

Sample APA format for books.

Silver, L. (1997). *Remaking Eden: cloning and beyond in a brave new world.* New York: Avon Books.

Landmark Project.

The Landmark Project is a citation machine that allows researchers to input works cited information such as author, title, copyright year, etc., into dialog boxes. Once the information is entered, the citation machine will display correct MLA and APA formats for a variety of resources (books, interviews, articles, online databases, encyclopedias, etc.). The URL address for the Landmark Project is:

http://www.landmark-project.com/citation_machine/index.php .

Evaluate your sources in the following areas:

- Accuracy
- Authority
- Objectivity
- Currency
- Coverage

Evaluating sources

When evaluating information, particularly web sites, that you want to include in your paper, be sure to check the following areas before you use the source:

Accuracy

- Is the information reliable and error free?
- Is there an editor or someone who verifies or checks the information?

Authority

- Is there an author? Is the page signed?
- Is the author qualified? Is the author an expert?
- Who is the web page sponsor?
- Is the sponsor reputable? How reputable?
- Is there a link to information about the author or web page sponsor?
- If the page includes neither a signature nor indicates a sponsor, is there any other way to determine its origin? Look for a header or footer showing affiliation. Look at the URL <http://www.fbi.gov>. Look at the domain: .edu, .com, ac.uk, .org, .net.

Objectivity

- Does the information show a minimum of bias?
- Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- Is there any advertising on the page?

Currency

- Is the page dated?
- If so, when was the last update?
- How current are the links? Have some links expired or moved?

Coverage

- What topics are covered?
- What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere?
- How in-depth is the information in this source – does it skim the surface or provide a great deal of material?