Beginning a Research Project

Getting Started

- Make sure you understand your assignment and your professor's requirements.
- Formulate good research questions. Try to shape these questions from your own interest and curiosity about the subject. Your research questions may ultimately feed into your thesis statement and can create a framework for interpretation of the material.
- Ask yourself what *types* of material you are looking for. Would your professor like you to use books and periodicals only, or are Internet sources acceptable?
- ➤ Before taking the trip to the library, you can do initial research from home on the New School University Library Web site: http://library.newschool.edu/. The Library's site gives you access to numerous online databases for researching print and visual resources. You can also search the holdings of both New School and NYU libraries through the Web site's "search Bobcat" function. Access Bobcat directly at: http://www.bobcat.nyu.edu.

Using Libraries

- Visit Fogelman and Bobst (NYU) libraries for social science, liberal arts, and humanities material; Gimbel Library for art, architecture, and design resources; and Scherman Library for classical music collections. For more information on the NSU Library's resources visit http://library.newschool.edu. You can also use the New York Public Library's extensive collections. For more information, go to www.nypl.org.
- All of the New School libraries provide students access to specialized research librarians who can answer queries or meet with you to provide research guidance.
- ➤ If you are new to library research, sign up for one of the NSU Library's "Library Research" or "Information Literacy" modules. A calendar of Library events and workshops is available at: http://library.newschool.edu/calendar/.
- ➤ Begin your library research by searching the catalog for sources. If you have a specific book or author in mind, you can look them up directly; however, for a research paper you will probably also want to search the catalog by subject. Think of different subjects under which your materials might be listed and look them up. When you find titles that seem helpful, also check to see if they are listed under any other relevant subjects and look those up as well.
- As you search the stacks for the specific books you identified in the catalog, take time to look at the surrounding shelves. Sometimes you can find related books this way which are even more helpful than the original source you looked up in the catalog.

Recording Your Research

- ➤ Look for information that is related to your topic and your focused research questions.
- ➤ Use a notebook or laptop computer to record your research. Also, some people choose to record their research on notecards. This method might be helpful for creating a visual representation of your paper's chronology. Try to arrange your findings in an organized and easy-to-understand way.
- Take notes as you research, but try not to write the text verbatim. Allow yourself to interpret the information as you write, and your interpretations can be a starting point for your paper. However, if you notice a passage which you think you might want to quote in your paper, then you may want to copy it into your notes. Take care to place quotation marks around the portion of the text you have copied and to accurately record its context and source. Misrepresentation of the author's argument is academically dishonest.
- ➤ Write down the source and page number of the material you are using, even if you are summarizing or paraphrasing, to aid in citation later on. You can also use RefWorks to keep track of your citations. RefWorks is a bibliographic database system in used by NSU Library. Sign up for a RefWorks training through the New School University Libraries' website: http://library.newschool.edu/calendar/.
- ➤ It is possible to go too far in your research. Try not to meander too far from your main ideas or research questions. Continually ask yourself, "How will this benefit my paper?"
- Responsible research begins with primary sources and then incorporates secondary sources. Examples of primary sources include a philosophical text, a piece of art, or a government document, while a secondary source might be a commentary on the philosophical text, an art review, or a textbook on a government document.
- ➤ Compile a list of your sources as you research. This will help you keep track of what you have done and facilitate creating your bibliography later.

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