Starting your research

There are many steps in the research process and these are not necessarily linear. Clearly defining ideas and concepts at the beginning of the process will help you immensely when it’s time to sit down and actually start researching information. Once you start to learn more about your topic you may find that you need to go back and revise these ideas -- this is a key element of research so be flexible but maintain your focus.

Key elements when beginning the research process:
- choose a topic and brainstorm for ideas
- define your topic and focus your research question
- identify key words and create a concept map
- begin your search making use of a variety of resources
- broaden or refine your research question based on results

Choose a topic and brainstorm for ideas

Choose a topic that interests you, this will make the process easier and you will get more out of your project. If you have a research paper due for a class ask yourself: is there an aspect of that class that you are interested in learning more about? Did you read or see a news story recently related to topics covered in class that has piqued your interest?

While brainstorming write down:
- what you already know about the topic
- what you want to know about the topic
- any keywords that describe your topic
- alternative terms for your concepts or ideas

Define your topic and focus your research question

Once you’ve chosen a broad topic you need to develop a more focused interest in an aspect of that subject. Ask yourself the “W questions” (Who? What? Where? When? Why?): these questions can help you locate specific points of interest in your general topic area. You can also gather some background information, try searching for books and encyclopaedias in the library catalogue to see what information is already out there on your topic: http://catalogue.bib.uottawa.ca/html/start.jsp?language=en

- Broad topic (What?)
  - e-business technologies
- Narrow topic (Who?)
  - e-business technologies in small businesses
- Focused topic (Where?)
  - e-business technologies in Canadian small businesses
- Research question
  - What are the key factors that influence the adoption of e-business technologies in small businesses in Canada?
Identify keywords and create a concept map

Once you have created a focused research question underline or highlight the key concepts. Think of different words you can use to describe those concepts; make use of the list you created while brainstorming. Let’s use the example above:

What are the key factors that influence the adoption of e-business technologies in small businesses in North America?

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<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>e-business technology OR e-commerce technology OR ICT</th>
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<td>AND</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>small businesses OR small and medium enterprises OR SMEs</td>
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<td>AND</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
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Begin your search by making use of a variety of resources

Use your strategy to search in library databases. Make use of multidisciplinary and subject-specific databases to find the latest scholarly research. Theses are also great sources of information as they contain exhaustive bibliographies you can consult for further reading. If you need the latest information available, consider newspaper databases. You will find suggestions of recommended databases for each of these source types in the library’s research guides. Consult the e-Business technologies research guide here: http://uottawa.ca.libguides.com/ebiztechnologies

Broaden or refine your research question based on results

You should aim to find a manageable amount of articles that directly address your topic. How many articles are “manageable” will depend on the assigned length of the research paper and the depth of coverage needed. If you have thousands of hits you will need to refine your results: many databases offer options to refine your results by location, subject, publication year, etc. Don’t be afraid to explore the features of each database to make sure that you have found the articles most relevant to your research question. If you have too few results you may need to broaden your topic. As you search you may decide that some other aspect of the topic is more interesting or manageable: it is common to modify your question during the research process.
Starting your research - worksheet

Key elements of an effective search strategy:
- choose a topic and brainstorm for ideas
- define your topic and focus your research question
- identify key words and create a concept map
- begin your search making use of a variety of resources
- broaden or refine your research question based on results

Choose a topic and brainstorm for ideas

Choose a topic that interests you, this will make the process easier and you will get more out of your project. Here are some questions to ask yourself at this point:

Is there an aspect of a class that you are interested in learning more about?

Did you read or see a news story recently related to topics covered in class that has piqued your interest?

What do you already know about the topic?

What you want to know about the topic?

Can you think of any keywords that describe your topic?

Can you think of alternative terms for your concepts or ideas?

Define your topic and focus your research question

You will often begin with a word, develop a more focused interest in an aspect of something relating to that word, and then begin to have questions about the topic. Use this section to focus your research question:

Broad topic:
Narrow topic:

Focused topic:

Research question:

**Identify keywords and create a concept map**

Once you have created a focused research question underline or highlight the key concepts. Think of different words you can use to describe those concepts; make use of the list you created while brainstorming.

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**Begin your search by making use of a variety of resources**

http://uottawa.ca.libguides.com/ebiztechnologies

**Broaden or refine your research question based on results**

You should aim to find a manageable amount of articles that directly address your topic. If you have thousands of hits explore the database options to refine your results. If you have only a few hits consider how you could broaden your research question.