

## Preliminary Steps in Writing a Research Paper

### Understand the assignment:

1. What your study is to yield
  - Answers to a problem
  - A review of the literature
  - Review of the literature and analysis
2. Approach to be used
  - Reading and note-taking
  - Experimentation
3. Depth and breath of your coverage
  - Survey
  - Narrow intense study
4. Materials you are to use
  - Current periodicals
  - Journal articles
  - Thesis
  - Original document
  - Laboratory
5. Format your professor requires (varies with academic discipline)
  - A.P.A. style sheet (for psych.)
  - MLA style sheet

### Selecting your topic:

1. Scan the literature for ideas
  - Notice approaches authors use
  - Look for new ideas
    - Unanswered questions the author raises
    - Author's suggestions that other areas need studying
    - Related ideas this reading suggests to you
2. Determine the suitability of this topic
  - Does it interest you enough to pursue it fully?
  - Is your background in this area enough for you to understand the readings?
  - Is the equipment you would use readily available?
    - Laboratory equipped and available?
    - Enough books available? Prepare a tentative bibliography to check this.
      - Will others be using the same books?
      - Can you take the books home?
      - Will you need to go distant libraries for books?
      - Are the books in the reserve room?

### Narrowing your topic:

1. Write a guiding purpose
  - A problem you hope to solve
  - Narrow area you will survey
2. Devise a brief, tentative, preliminary outline

- Main headings only
- Steps in order

**Prepare a bibliography of sources you can expect to consult on 3 x 5 cards:**

1. Use form you will use on final bibliography (get this from the style sheet)
2. Record the call number and location in the library you will be using
3. Locate sources
  - Card catalogues
  - Bibliography in your index
  - Indexes in your field
  - General indexes
  - Bibliographies following article on your topic in an encyclopedia