

# TERM PAPER RESEARCH

Getting started with term paper research can be daunting. To help you navigate the research process, we've created a Research Roadmap, complete with some important checkpoints. **Follow the route below for term paper research success** and scroll down for details about each checkpoint.



## THE FIRST STRETCH: Choosing a Topic



When choosing a research topic for your term paper, read the assignment description (taking note of any specific requirements) and ask yourself the following questions:

1. **What topics interest me?** Consider issues discussed in class, current events, and anything you're curious about. Write down 3 things that interest you, even if you don't think they relate to your course. You might be surprised at the connections you can make! Use these to inform your research topic.
2. **How long does my paper need to be?** Term paper lengths vary. Keep in mind the length of your paper when choosing a topic. If your topic is too specific, you may not have enough material to write about. If your topic is too broad, you may run over the page limit (and feel overwhelmed).

### A BEND IN THE ROAD: Have you registered your Dal card?

Before you can complete the next stretch of the research roadmap, you need to make sure your Dal card is registered as your library card. You can do this two ways: online (<https://libraries.dal.ca/borrow/library-cards.html>) or at any of the Libraries' service points.



## THE SECOND STRETCH: Search for Information



A major part of the research process is searching for information. **To help you with your search, check out the Dalhousie Libraries Subject Guides (<http://dal.ca.libguides.com/>)** . These guides are

created by librarians to assist with your research. Simply search for your subject in the subject guides list (eg. History or Biology) and discover key resources.

Here are a few types of information resources that you might want to search for. Check your subject guide for more information:

- **Reference Sources**

Reference sources, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, are excellent for looking up both **general background information on a topic and specific facts and figures**. Check out our Reference Collections (<http://libraries.dal.ca/find/reference-collections.html>) when searching for this kind of information. There are also reputable online encyclopedias like *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/>) or *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>).

- **Scholarly Books & Articles**

Scholarly books and articles are the most typical information resources used in term paper research. **Search for books in the library catalogue** (<http://bit.ly/2aC7unp>). **Search for articles in databases** (<http://dal.ca.libguides.com/az.php>).

For tips on which databases are best suited to your topic, refer to your subject guide where you will usually find a helpful **key databases list (or a “Find Articles” tab)**. Keep in mind that there are also multidisciplinary databases, such as Academic Search Premier and Research Library, which cover a wide range of topics.

- **Media Commentary**

Finding media commentary on your topic can also be useful (and is required for some assignments). Check out Dalhousie Libraries' collected print/online magazines and newspapers (<http://dal.ca.libguides.com/newspapers>) for this kind of research.

### **THE THIRD STRETCH: Read and Reflect**



Once you have found a variety of relevant sources, it's time to get reading. While you read, be sure to highlight any quotes that seem important and **take notes as you go**. Jot down any questions or

thoughts that come to mind while you read, and write down key terms and points as you come across them. **Reflect on how each resource relates to the others.**

Next, use your notes to **write an outline for your paper.** Think of each resource as a building block: how do they fit together to build your argument? Figuring this out at the outline stage will save you time later.

### **THE ROAD HOME: Write and Cite**



**Use your outline to structure and guide your writing.** If you struggle with this checkpoint, be sure to take a detour to the Dalhousie University Writing Centre ([http://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html](http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html)) to receive assistance with your writing.

Lastly, **don't forget to cite your sources.** The various resources you tracked down and read for your paper deserve (and require) explicit credit. If you are unsure what citation style to use or how to cite a particular resource, check out our Citation Style Guide (<http://dal.ca.libguides.com/CitationStyleGuide>) or ask a librarian for assistance.

### **IS IT REALLY THAT SIMPLE?**

Okay... so maybe term paper research isn't QUITE as simple as running in a straight, direct path to a clear finish line. **Your research may require that you occasionally backtrack and return to previous checkpoints**—this is totally normal.

For example, as you search, you may decide that your topic is too general (you're overwhelmed by all the information you find) or too specific (you can't find enough on your topic): **return to the first stretch of the roadmap and revise your topic choice.**

Or, you may read an amazing article that introduces a new aspect of your topic. You want more literature that tackles this aspect: **return to the second stretch of the roadmap and continue your search.**

Or, as you write, you may develop new thoughts on your topic that are not reflected in the original outline of your argument: **return to the third stretch on the map and re-work your outline.**

Use this roadmap to structure your research process but don't be afraid to follow the route backwards whenever necessary!

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