Conducting Research

The two best places to look for sources for your research paper are the Library Catalog and Databases.

Library Catalog: This is where you will find resources that the library owns, such as print books, e-books, reference materials, and films. Check the university library website for assistance on how to search.

Databases: This is where you will find the most up-to-date resources, such as newspaper articles, magazine articles, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Even those you will access these as electronic materials, you will still need to go through the library website to do so since the library pays to access these materials. If you don't go through the library website, you will not be able to access many of these resources. There are many different databases divided up by subject area and discipline; you can choose a database that suits your assignment needs and find the articles most relevant to your research. Check the university library website for assistance on how to access these databases and how to search.

There are many types of sources you will encounter in your research. Here is a brief overview of the differences between them.

Print Book: a physical book, usually located in the library stacks
. contain a lot of information, but not constantly updated like many other sources

E-Book: an electronic book, only located online
. same as print book, but easier to search through text

Newspaper Article: an article from a daily or weekly newspaper, usually found online
. contain most up-to-date information, but don't always give a complete picture

Magazine Article: an article from a weekly/monthly/quarterly magazine, usually found online
. contain fairly up-to-date information, but quality of magazines varies greatly

Article from an Online News Source: an article from a news website, only located online
. contain most up-to-date information, but reliability varies greatly

Article in a Scholarly Journal: sometimes referred to as a Peer-Reviewed Journal, written exclusively by experts in the field, only found through database searches
. more in-depth than other types of articles, but tend to be longer and often too specific for introductory college papers

Databases

A database is a place, usually online, where a lot of information is stored. As previously discussed, you can gain access to databases through the CityTech library, and find sources using the search functions. However, not all information is located in the same database, so you will have to decide which database(s) are right for your research.

Pro-Tip: Using Google for a college research paper is almost always a waste of time. You will come up with many search results that are useless, not appropriate for a college paper, and/or that require payment before reading. Skip Google and go right to the CityTech library databases.

For your ENG 1101 Research Project, these are the recommended databases:

1. Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)
    - a general database
    - gives a wide assortment of newspaper, magazine, and scholarly journal articles
    - very large, be sure to use advanced search options

2. Opposing Viewpoints in Context (Gale)
    - a database that focuses on current, social issues
    - gives a wide assortment of newspaper, magazine, online news sources, and scholarly journal articles, as well as podcasts, radio broadcasts, statistics, and video sources
    - results grouped by type of source
    - DO NOT USE sources listed as "Viewpoints" or "Featured Viewpoints," these are bad sources because they are summaries of a lot of different sources, given with bias, and without proper citation

3. The New York Times, Digital
    - a database of *New York Times* articles, a daily newspaper with a very good reputation
    - you will need to register for a free account with your CityTech email address to access
    - there are a lot of opinion-based pieces in this database, be sure to check if the source is a news reporting article or some kind of opinion piece

4. Wall Street Journal Digital
    - a database of *Wall Street Journal* articles, a daily financially-focused newspaper with a very good reputation
    - you will need to register for a free account with your CityTech email address to access
    - there are a lot of opinion-based pieces in this database, be sure to check if the source is a news reporting article or some kind of opinion piece

Pro-Tip: Once you have located sources in the databases it is VERY IMPORTANT to keep a record of all the sources you use. The easiest way to do this is to email yourself a copy of EVERY source you read, use, or may use in the future. It can be difficult to find a source a second time, and if you don't know where a piece of information comes from you will not be able to use it in your paper.

Keywords + Searching

When searching for sources, the words that you type in are called Keywords.

Keywords are very important and can make the difference between finding what you need and getting stuck.

The computer uses language differently than we do, so you need to think differently when working with keywords.
  For example: If you were doing a paper on what kids should eat, you might want to use the words "kids" and "eat" to search. However, these are not the best keywords. Instead, try using the words "children" and "nutrition." The difference is simply that information is cataloged by "official" keywords, so more formal vocabulary will get you better results. Meaning, "kids" is really the informal word for "children," making children the better search term. Although "eat" and "nutrition" do not mean the same exact thing, by searching for "nutrition" you will get sources that discuss what children need to eat in order to have good nutrition.

If you are not finding many results in your database searches, try changing your keywords. You can also look up the "Creating an Effective Search Strategy" video posted by Purdue University on YouTube for more tips.

Remember to also utilize multiple search boxes, when available. You will get different search results if you type all of your words into one search box, than if you type one keyword into each search box (connected by AND).

You can also use the multiple search boxes to get rid of specific results.
  For example: If you were working with keywords "children" and "nutrition," but keep getting sources that only talk about babies, you may want to enter "infant" into one of the search boxes, and change the connector from AND to NOT. This will then give you all the sources that mention both "children" and "nutrition," but leave out the ones that mention "infant" specifically.

Keywords will help you find the best, or most relevant, sources, but often you will need to refine your results even further. The best way to do this is by using the Advanced Search feature in the database.

Advanced search allows you to set additional parameters on your search so that you only get results that are relevant to what you are looking for.

Some of the advanced search options you may want to use:
  - *Full Text:* by selecting the full text option, you will limit your search to sources that you actually have access to (the management of sources online is very complicated, and there are many sources that require you to pay before reading them; by selecting full text you will only be looking at sources that the library has already paid for you to have access to)
  - *Date:* by setting a date range (only use years, not months and days), you will limit your search to sources that have been published within that time frame; this will eliminate results that are not relevant to what you are researching

Pro-Tip: If you don't use any parameters and have very broad keywords, you will get an overwhelming number of results and probably have difficulty deciding which sources to use. On the other hand, if you set too many parameters, you will filter out materials that may be useful in your research, so be selective and go slowly. You might have to play around with the search features in order to find a good balance.

Assessing Sources

Once you have found sources that appear to be useful for your paper, how will you decide which ones to use? A good search will still yield more results than you can reasonably read, so you need ways to decide which sources are worth your time, and which ones you can skip.

First, read the *abstract* for the source. In the previously mentioned databases, every source has an *abstract*, or summary of its content that is only a paragraph. This is an easy way to determine if the source is actually focusing on your research paper topic.

After reading the abstract, there are four basic principles to use when assessing a source.

1. *Current:* Is the source offering current information?
   Has it been published recently? Or if not recently, was it published at a time that makes sense for your topic? Old sources can contain information that is no longer correct, so think about WHEN the source was published.

2. *Reliable:* Is the source offering reliable information?
   Is the information given in the source cited? Is it information that can be confirmed from a second source? Is there obvious bias in the way the information is being present? Unreliable sources can cause a lot of problems, so think about WHERE the information is coming from.

3. *Authority:* Does the source come from an authority on the topic?
   Is the author(s) an expert on the topic? Do they have the expertise to write knowledgeably about the topic? Is the source published by a reputable company or institution? Anyone can write anything on the internet, so think about WHO is providing the information you use.

4. *Purpose:* What was the intended purpose of this source?
   Is this source intended to inform or to persuade? Is the source trying to sell a product or prove a particular political point? Is the source a result of scholarly research and/or interest? There are lots of different reasons that people write things, so think about WHY this information was provided.