Welcome to the research process with the UNF Library!

Research is key to every assignment and your academic success.

Whether you’re writing a paper, lab report, annotated bibliography, creating a presentation, or tackling a capstone project, strong research skills help you find credible information, deepen your understanding, and sharpen your critical thinking.

At its core, research is a process of finding, analyzing and making sense of information to answer complex questions, explore new ideas, and make informed decisions.

The UNF library is essential for your research!

While search engines like Google are great for everyday searching, many scholarly resources – like journal articles, books, and databases, are behind paywalls due to publishing costs.

The great news is the library provides access to these high-quality sources through its subscriptions. That means you don’t have to pay to access and use trusted, reliable information for your assignments.

By using the library, you can also connect with our librarians who provide personalized research help – whether you are searching for sources, applying style guides to cite and reference your sources, or looking to build research skills.

Your research can draw from many sources—articles, reports, industry data, case studies, conference proceedings, books, and more.

The key is knowing how to find and use the right information for your specific assignment.

For example, **business administration or management** students might analyze market trends to prepare a business plan or analyze case studies to back up a strategy. D**ata analytics students** could explore large datasets to make predictions. And those in **digital media or global communication** might study audience responses or tech trends to inform a creative approach to digital storytelling.

You might be thinking, “I find information all the time, I’m a research pro!” But search and research are actually very different.

**Search** is quick and easy; it’s what we do every day to find answers to simple questions, like what are the top tourist attractions in Niagara Falls to visit, a top-rated chocolate chip cookie recipe, or how to fix a leaky faucet. Search is all about convenience and speed, but it is surface-level and not always accurate.

**Research**, on the other hand, goes beyond simply collecting information. It’s a more in-depth, analytical process that requires exploring multiple sources and critically engaging with the information to build a deeper understanding. It also required evaluating and analyzing reliable sources to support answering complex questions.

We can view the research process as six key stages. Let’s take a quick look.

First, we **explore**! This early stage is all about building a broad and basic understanding of your topic. You’re not digging into details just yet.

There are lots of great starting points for this kind of initial searching:

**Non-scholarly sources** like Google, Wikipedia, and news pieces can be helpful for quick overviews. These aren’t academic or peer-reviewed, but they can give you a general sense of a topic, introduce key terms or issues, and even spark new angles to explore. Just remember: these sources are for your background knowledge—not for citing in your paper.

**Scholarly sources** can also be part of your early searching. Skimming through **titles and abstracts** in academic databases helps you see how researchers are framing or discussing a topic. You don’t need to read everything in full yet—take note of topic trends, common questions, or gaps.

**Research Starters**, available through our library’s discovery tool, offer concise, credible summaries on a wide range of topics. These are great for understanding background information! You can access through the library discovery layer – type in your topic and on the results page select research starters as your resource type.

Think of this phase as a research warm-up: get curious, get oriented, and start shaping your direction.

As you explore, keep your **assignment** in mind – it helps you understand your research need - why you’re searching in the first place. What is your assignment asking you to do? Are you writing a paper, creating a presentation, or preparing a business proposal?

Each type of assignment requires different kinds of information, and knowing what you’re expected to deliver will guide your exploration.

Next, it's time to narrow down your topic and turn it into a clear research question.

Your question should be:

**Clear and focused** – to define your research goal and keep your argument on track for the reader.

**Balanced** – Avoid making your question too broad, as it’ll be hard to answer deeply. But, don’t make it too narrow either, or you might struggle to find enough material to build a strong argument.

**Complex** – You want a question that invites deeper analysis—not just a simple yes or no answer or basic description.

And of course, your question needs to be **researchable**. Make sure there are enough reliable sources out there to back up your points.

When narrowing your research question, consider opportunities for **interdisciplinary research,** or when your topic crosses multiple fields. For example, a question like "How do leadership styles impact employee motivation?" blends **management** and **psychology.**

Exploring these connections can lead to deeper insights and means you’ll be using various resources across different disciplines.

Remember, it’s normal for your question to evolve as you explore. The more you learn, the more your focus may shift—that’s all part of the research process!

Next, we move into the **investigate** stage, where your approach becomes more intentional and research focused. To do so, creating a search strategy will provide you with a plan of action for knowing what to search for, where to look, and how to manage all the results you’ll find.

A good search strategy will help you:

**Build your search** – by combining keywords, Boolean operators, and other search functions used to refine results as you identify relevant information

**Choose your tools** – ask you to consider which databases, search engines, or research platforms best fit your topic.

Not sure where to start? Check out the **library website**—you’ll find **research guides** tailored to different subjects and a list of **database descriptions** to help get you started.

**Identify the right resources** – Think about the kind of information your research question calls for. Do you need scholarly articles, news stories, industry reports, or datasets? Most databases let you **filter results by source type**, so you can quickly zero in on the format you need.

Having a clear strategy makes all the difference. It helps you find relevant, reliable information efficiently, ensuring your research is solid and focused.

In the next phase, **Collect and Evaluate**, you will put your search strategy into action.

Remember when we talked about the different between search and research? During this phase, there will be a clear shift: you’re no long just exploring – you're now intentionally collecting credible, authoritative information to help answer your research question.

But before you use any source to support your ideas, it’s essential to **critically evaluate** it.

Ask yourself:

Is it relevant to my topic?

Is it reliable?

Is it from a credible, trustworthy source?

Evaluating sources is a key part of the research process. It helps identify each source’s strengths, weaknesses, and limitations—so you can confidently select the ones that will add value to your research.

The **Synthesize** stage is where your research comes together. You will combine what you’ve learned with own insights to build strong, well-supported arguments.

How you present your research findings will depend on your assignment. It could be a research paper, a presentation, an infographic. Whatever the format, your goal is the same: to communicate your understanding in a meaningful way.

You’re not just repeating others—you’re analyzing, connecting ideas, and contributing your own unique perspective to the topic.

To help express your ideas effectively, make use of the [Writing Centre resources](https://library.unfc.ca/writing-centre#guides) through the library website. Whether you’re writing or presenting, the Writing Centre has several research guides and workshops that will help you build confidence, strengthen your academic communication skills, and polish your final work.

You’ve explored, investigated, analyzed, and synthesized—now it’s time for the final stage: **Cite**.

Using a citation style like **APA**, **MLA**, or **Chicago** helps you format your paper, create in-text citations, and build a proper reference list.

But citing your sources isn’t just a technical step—it’s a **key part of responsible research**. It shows that you’ve done your homework, it gives credit to the original authors, and it helps others trace your research path if they want to explore further. Most importantly, it helps you avoid plagiarism and strengthens the credibility of your work.

Think of this stage as the finishing touch—the part that ties your work together, shows respect for the research community, and demonstrates your growth as a researcher.

Congratulations—you’ve made it through the research process! Don’t forget, you can always revisit this video anytime you need a refresher or a bit of inspiration for your next assignment.

Thanks for watching! If you ever feel stuck or need a bit of guidance, our research and instruction librarians are here to help. Visit the library website to explore our Research Skills Guide and other digital learning resources. And if you need personalized support, you can always book a research consultation with a librarian. We look forward to connecting with you soon!