

Creating a Successful Research Project

Steps:

1. Generating a Topic
2. Key Words
3. Narrowing the Topic
4. Research
5. Note Taking
6. Outline
7. Plagiarism
8. Bibliography



Selecting a Topic:

3 Ways to Find a Topic:

1. Teacher will assign you a topic

- When given a topic, there should not be an issue in deciding on a topic.

2. Teacher provides a guideline in choosing a topic

- The teacher may have a general topic for students to research about.
- Ex: Ocean; students may choose to write about currents, sea animals, coral reef, etc.

3. Teacher gives free reign in picking a topic

- When teachers give students the freedom to research about any topic, it may be difficult to decide. Pick a topic that interests you, or you might be stuck with a topic like *Tax Preparation*.

How to Pick a Topic:

Consider the following checkpoints:

- Topic is within guidelines and requirements of the assignment**
- Topic is not too broad or too narrow**
 - depends on the length of the paper
- Topic is relevant to reader, current time and situation**
 - debatable, important, controversial
- Topic is interesting to you**
 - picking an interesting topic will make the research process more fun and result in an engaging piece others will want to read
- Topic is something you vaguely know about**
 - writing about something you are not familiar with can lead to a unique perspective to the topic and lead to discovery of new information which is the point of research
- Topic is not common**
 - a simple common topic can lead to plagiarism, the topic should involve critical thinking on the writer's part

Generating a Key Words List:

After obtaining a general topic:

- Write a sentence or two about your topic
- Underline the key words in your sentence(s)
- Create a list for these key words
- Add more by writing down synonyms

Example:

General Topic: Rainforest

Sentence: I want to write about animals found in a rainforest such as monkeys or snakes.

Key words: animals → mammals → reptiles
rainforest → Amazon → tropical forest
monkeys → apes → orangutan
snakes → boa constrictor → viper

Why is this important:

The key words will help find relevant information faster. Key words can be searched using indexes in books or online search engines and databases.

Key Words

Understanding the topic:

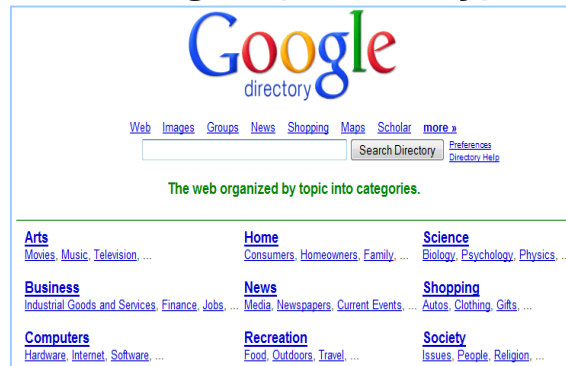
Use the key words to find general information:

Encyclopedia



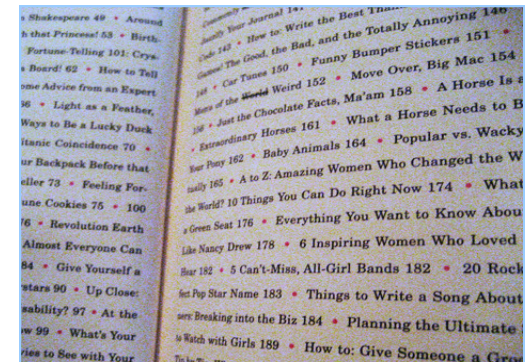
Skim encyclopedia articles on the key words.

Google (directory)



Use key words to search online for general information.

Book



Skim over the introduction and table of contents of a book pertaining to the topic.

As you get an overview of the general topic, start to ask questions that you want to get answers for. This will help to further narrow your topic and help with the research process.

How to narrow your topic:

If your topic can be summarized in one word it is too broad. A *thesis statement* should be written to help assert your view, structure your argument, and introduce evidence to back up your points.

Ways to narrow your topic:

1. Make sure your thesis statement answers *some* of the following questions:

Who? When? What? Which? Where? How?

ex. **Migrating birds** → **Weather effects on journey of migrating birds in winter.**(what, when)

2. Encyclopedia Method: **Skim over an encyclopedia article and read a few intro paragraphs, subheadings, and look at pictures.**

ex. **Birds** → **Birds migrating in the winter.** → **Arctic terns migrating to Southern Ocean.**

3. Subtopic Method: **Focus topic by limiting subtopics: chronological, geographical, biographical, event-based and technological.**

ex. **Geo:** **The different species of birds migrating from Alaska.**

Tech: **How new transmitters help track path of migrating birds.**

Narrowing the Topic

Creating an interesting topic:

Look for current events or stories related to your topic :

Twitter



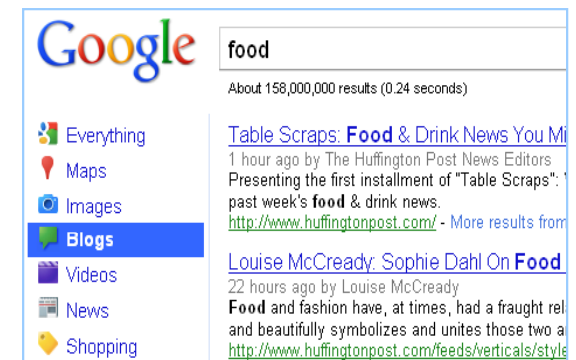
See what others are talking about find something you can tie into your topic.

Google (Wonder wheel)



Use this visual tool to help narrow down your topic and find more information.

Blogs

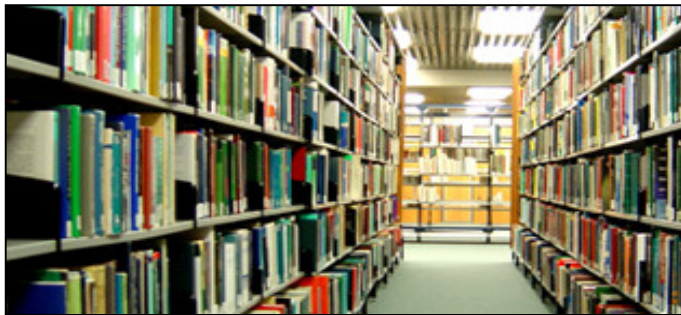


See what blogs are writing about and how this might help with your topic.

Look for something that interests you and is also current. For instance, if you're writing about wildlife you may want to write about how the recent oil spill has affected the animals in the water and along the coast.

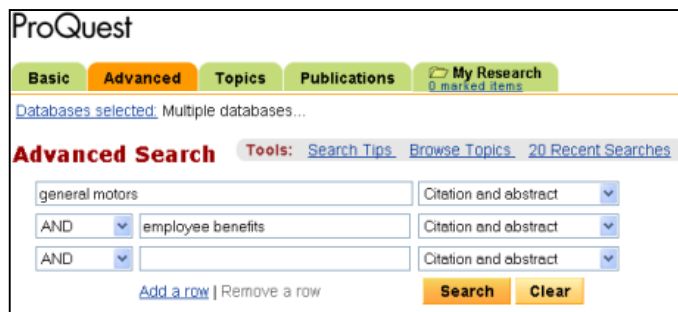
Research

Where to find sources:



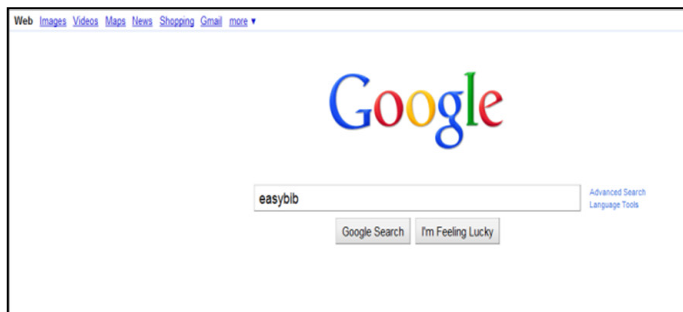
Library

Go to the library to search for books on research topic. Having trouble finding sources? Ask the librarian for help.



Database

Use databases like GaleGroup or ProQuest to search through journals for relevant articles.



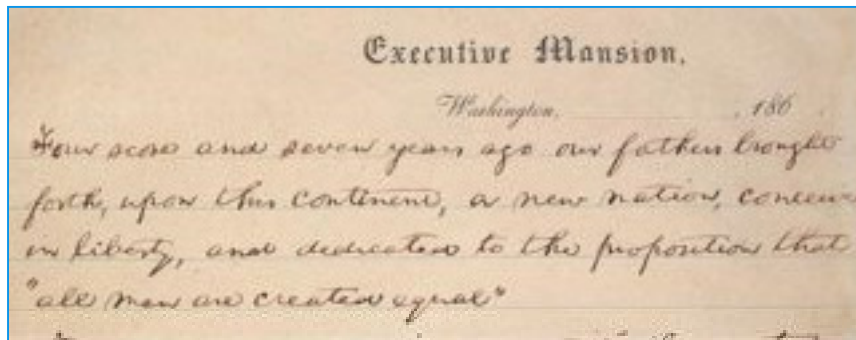
Internet

The Internet provides a wide range of information. Be aware that the Internet contains user generated content which may not be correct. When using sources from the Internet ask yourself if the site looks legitimate. If not, do not use the source.

More variety in sources results in more diverse information for your project!

Gathering sources:

Primary Sources



ex. research studies, diaries, letters

These sources are original, first hand documents.

Secondary Sources



ex. newspapers, magazines, textbooks

These sources are generally analyses or historical interpretations of primary sources.

Depending on the assignment, a primary source may be a secondary source and vice versa. Most articles in newspapers are secondary sources, but stories from the eyewitness point of view is considered primary.

Primary and Secondary Sources Exercise #1:

Your research project is the **weather** in your hometown. Which of the following would be considered primary and secondary sources?

1. An interview with a professor that teaches atmospheric science.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
2. Statistical reports of the historical weather in the area.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
3. A book: *The Weather Identification Handbook: The Ultimate Guide for Weather Watchers* by Storm Dunlop, 2003.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
4. Data from the most recent edition of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
5. An interview with a local television station meteorologist.
 - Primary
 - Secondary

Primary and Secondary Sources Exercise #1: Answers

1. An interview with a professor that teaches atmospheric science.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
2. Statistical reports of the weather in the area.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
3. A book titled *The Weather Identification Handbook: The Ultimate Guide for Weather Watchers* by Storm Dunlop, 2003.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
4. Data from the most recent edition of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
5. An interview with a local television station meteorologist.
 - Primary
 - Secondary

Numbers 2 and 4 are primary sources because the source has first-hand information or raw data. Numbers 1,3 and 5 are secondary sources because the sources analyzed and interpreted data from primary sources. If the professor in question 1 had done research on weather (s)he would be considered a primary source.

Primary and Secondary Sources Exercise #2:

Your research project is the **analysis of weather** in your hometown. Which of the following would be considered primary and secondary sources?

1. An interview with a professor that teaches atmospheric science.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
2. Statistical reports of the historical weather in the area.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
3. A book: *The Weather Identification Handbook: The Ultimate Guide for Weather Watchers* by Storm Dunlop, 2003.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
4. Data from the most recent edition of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
5. An interview with a local television station meteorologist.
 - Primary
 - Secondary

Primary and Secondary Sources Exercise #2: Answers

1. An interview with a professor that teaches atmospheric science.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
2. Statistical reports of the weather in the area.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
3. A book titled *The Weather Identification Handbook: The Ultimate Guide for Weather Watchers* by Storm Dunlop, 2003.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
4. Data from the most recent edition of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.
 - Primary
 - Secondary
5. An interview with a local television station meteorologist.
 - Primary
 - Secondary

1 and 5 are considered **primary sources for analysis on weather** because the meteorologist and the professor both have first hand experience in analyzing weather, whereas on the **broad topic of weather** they were **secondary sources**.

Evaluating Sources:

When researching it is important to understand and determine which sources are valid and provide answers to the research topic.

To verify the validity of a source answer the following questions:

- **Does the source have relevant information on your research topic?**

If the source talks about how modern architectures affected Europe and your topic is how modern architecture has affected your community, keep searching for a source that is more relevant.

- **Who is the author of the source?**

Consider if the author is providing an unbiased report. It is important see if the author clearly notes where and how information was obtained.

- **When was the sources written? Is the information provided still valid?**

Information older than 30 years may not be valid now.

How to take notes:

Use an index card for each source. Include as much of the following information as possible of the source.

Title. Author. Publisher. Place of Publication. Volume. Page Numbers. Date Published.

- *Having this information will be useful to create the citation of the source later on in the research project*

Do not write down everything from the source. Instead:

- ✓ Quote
- ✓ Paraphrase / Summarize
- ✓ Comment

You can easily create and save your bibliography as you research on EasyBib.com!

What to put on note cards:

Notes from the source may span multiple note cards. Be sure to **label each note** card for easy reference. Also label each note as quote, paraphrase / summary, or comment.

Quote: writing the author's exact words and punctuations.
Be sure to use quotation marks. (**Q**)

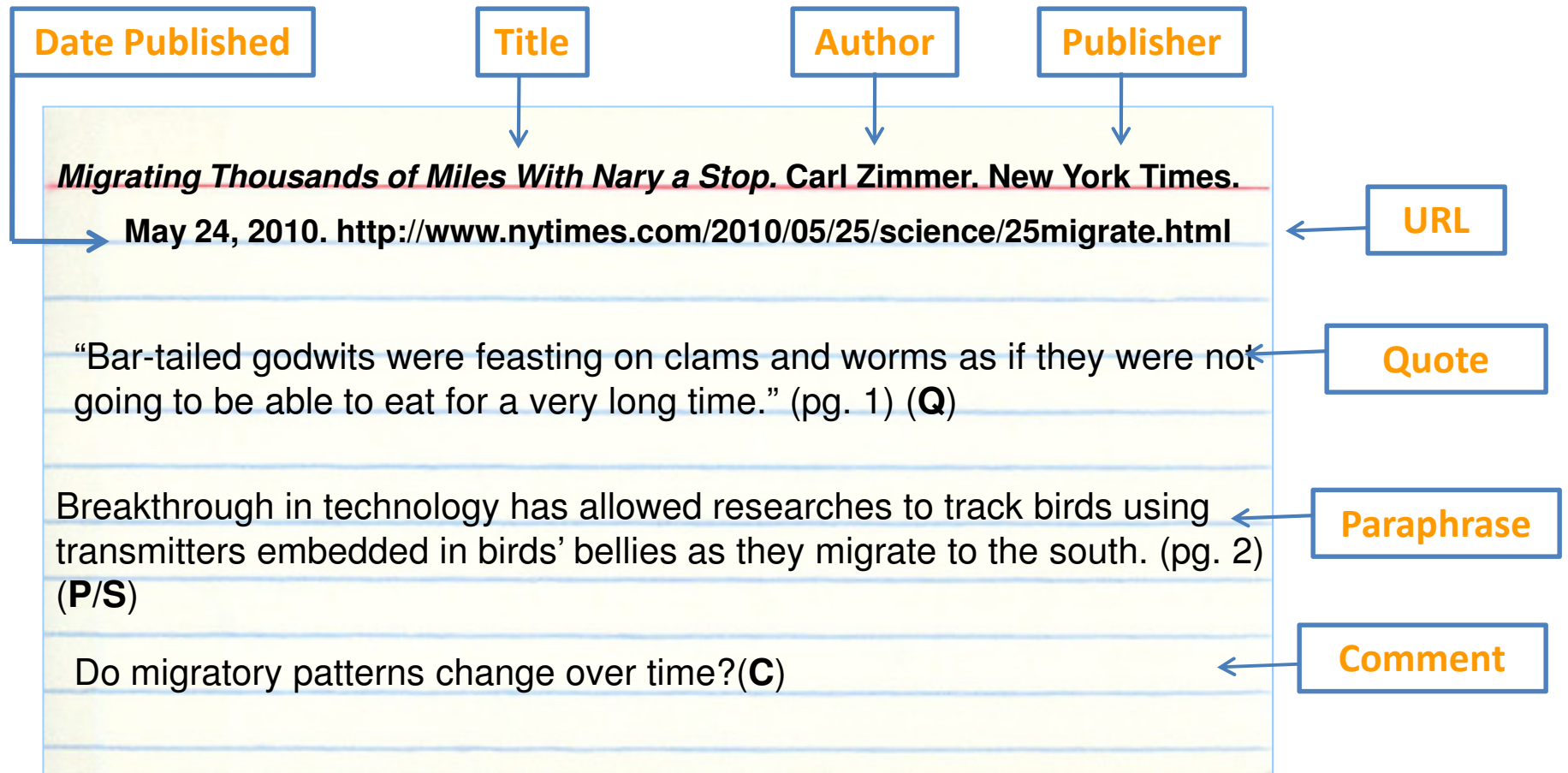
Paraphrasing / Summarize: use your own words to convey the essence of the sentence(s) or to write a summary of what you read. (**P**)

Comment: write down any thoughts or ideas. (**C**)

Write down the page number next to each note for proper citation when writing the research paper.

Learn about EasyBib's note taking features at: <http://www.easybib.com/products/notebooktour>

Example of a source note cards:



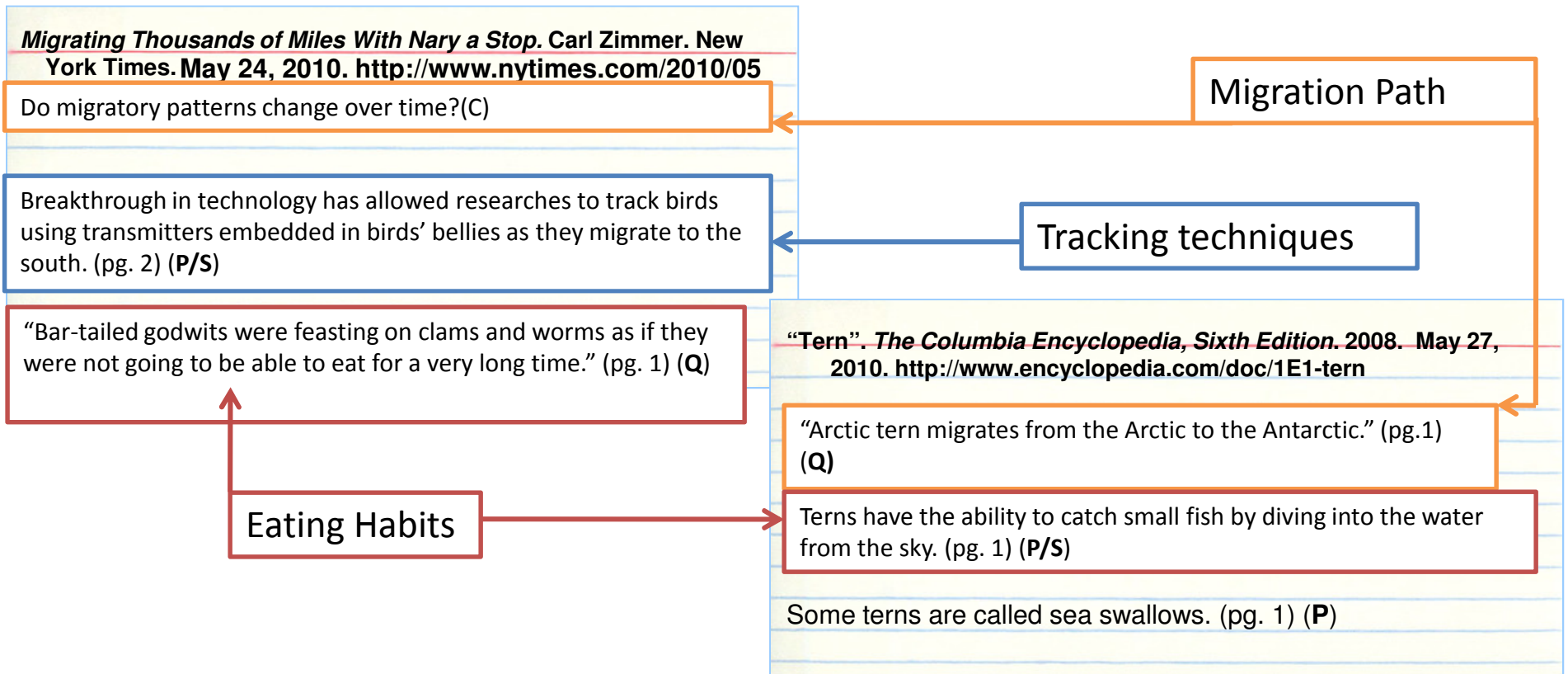
The diagram illustrates a source note card with the following components:

- Date Published:** May 24, 2010.
- Title:** *Migrating Thousands of Miles With Nary a Stop.*
- Author:** Carl Zimmer.
- Publisher:** New York Times.
- URL:** <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/science/25migrate.html>
- Quote:** “Bar-tailed godwits were feasting on clams and worms as if they were not going to be able to eat for a very long time.” (pg. 1) (Q)
- Paraphrase:** Breakthrough in technology has allowed researches to track birds using transmitters embedded in birds’ bellies as they migrate to the south. (pg. 2) (P/S)
- Comment:** Do migratory patterns change over time?(C)

How to use note cards:

After the note taking process is finished, reread each note card and look for subtopics that emerge from your notes. Start to group your notes into ideas instead of by source.

To distinguish what note goes with which topic try to **color-code your subtopics** or mark them with **symbols**.



How to use note cards:

Vary each subtopics with quotes, paraphrases and summaries. You don't want too many quotes in one section of your paper.

“Tern”. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2008. May 27, 2010. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-tern>

“Arctic tern migrates from the Arctic to the Antarctic.” (pg.1)(Q)

Terns have the ability to catch small fish by diving into the water from the sky. (pg. 1) (P)

~~Some terns are called sea swallows. (pg. 1)~~

It is okay to throw out notes that no longer pertain to your paper. You may even have to do more research now that you have a better understanding of where the paper is going.

Creating an Outline:

After sorting your note cards into subtopics, an outline can be easily created:

- A. Introduction**
 - I. Background
 - II. Thesis
- B. First Subtopic**
 - I. First Point
 - 1. Supporting Evidence
 - 2. Supporting Evidence
 - II. Second Point
 - 1. Supporting Evidence
 - 2. Supporting Evidence
- C. First Subtopic**
 - I. First Point
 - 1. Supporting Evidence
 - 2. Supporting Evidence
 - II. Second Point
 - 1. Supporting Evidence
 - 2. Supporting Evidence
- D. Conclusion**
 - I. Restate thesis and main points of paper

The outline will be helpful to structure the paper and keep your thoughts organized. When the audience reads your paper, it will be easy to understand.

What is plagiarism:

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary plagiarizing means to:

- to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one's own
- use another's production without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not

Plagiarism occurs when sources are not mentioned even if it is unintentional.

Quotation:

"Empire State College has a policy describing the conditions under which students may be warned or withdrawn from the College for such unethical academic behavior as plagiarism, forgery, misrepresentation, or other dishonest or deceptive acts which constitute grounds for warning or administrative withdrawal" (CDL Student Handbook 5).

Which one is Plagiarized?

- a. According to policy in the Student Handbook, Empire State College may take punitive action (including dismissal) against students who act fraudulently. Fraudulent action includes using the words or ideas of others without proper attribution, falsifying documents, or depicting the words of others as one's own (1992, p. 5). [APA format]
- b. The Student Handbook states that the College may dismiss students who in any way present others' work as their own (5). [MLA format]
- c. The Student Handbook states that the College has a policy that describes the different instances under which students may be withdrawn from the College. These instances include plagiarism, forgery, misrepresentation, and other instances that show dishonest or deceptive practice (1992, p. 5). [APA format]

Quotation:

"Empire State College has a policy describing the conditions under which students may be warned or withdrawn from the College for such unethical academic behavior as plagiarism, forgery, misrepresentation, or other dishonest or deceptive acts which constitute grounds for warning or administrative withdrawal" (CDL Student Handbook 5).

Which one is Plagiarized:

C. The Student Handbook states that the College has a policy that describes the different instances under which students may be withdrawn from the College. These instances include plagiarism, forgery, misrepresentation, and other instances that show dishonest or deceptive practice (1992, p. 5). [APA format]

This paraphrase is considered plagiarism because it contains the original language and sentence structure of the original quotation.

Why have a bibliography?

- *Citing sources make you and your research project more credible. Having facts and figures to back up your ideas makes them more believable and makes you look like an expert.*
- *If you are not documenting your sources you could be plagiarizing which may result in disciplinary action from school.*

Short MLA guide:

Book

MLA Last, First M. *Book*. City Published: Publisher, Year Published. Print.

Ex: Carley, Michael J. *1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II*. Chicago: Dee, 1999. Print.

Website

MLA Last, First M. "Website Article." *Website*. Publisher, Day ^{Date electronically published} Month Year. Web. Day ^{Date Accessed} Month Year.

Ex: Friedland, Lois. "Top 10 Natural and Wildlife Adventure Travel Trips." *About.com*. New York Times Company, 22 Sept. 2008. Web. 25 Sept. 2008.

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