The Research Process

For a literature review

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Your literature search is your opportunity to listen to what the scholars are saying about your topic. You need to know what the conversation is about before you start asking questions or looking for more answers.
You will want to find the best information possible about your topic.
Where do you start??

- **First** - Read your assignment and ask your instructor for clarification if needed.
- **Then** identify a general topic that interests you. (unless you already have a very specific research question in mind)
**General Topic**

- First ask - what is this topic all about?
  - Look for general information in books, encyclopedias, on reliable internet sources, and from knowledgeable people.
  - As you go, keep a list of words that describe the topic.

**Example:**

- Foot problems
  - From *Medline Plus* – foot health, diabetic foot, athlete’s foot, foot injuries
  - Keywords: tinea, ulcers, infection, tendons, muscles, ligaments, hammer toes, bunions, fallen arches
Focusing the Topic

- As you discover more about the general topic you will notice your interest will be drawn to certain aspects.
- Questions will also come up as you read.
- Continue to keep track of vocabulary.

Example

- Hammer toes are often caused by diabetes or alcoholism. The muscles weaken...
- What is the treatment of hammer toe?
- Keywords– claw toe, neurological disorders, claw toe deformity
Go to the Literature

- In the scholarly literature you will find out what the experts have been saying about your topic.
- Where are the experts in your topic publishing? Where are those sources indexed?
- Scholars publish in peer reviewed journals.
- Those journals are indexed in library databases.
- What discipline/s are interested in your topic?
Two essential ingredients

- Two things determine the information you find:
  - #1. The **words** you use. Gather both broad and narrow terms related to your topic. This will give you more control over your searches.
  - #2. **Where** you look. Think about where the scholars are talking. What disciplines are interested in this topic? Where are they published? The library sorts the indexes (databases) for you by subject.
Keywords

- Use the keywords you have been listing.
  - Some are broad– start with those.
  - Some are narrow– use those to reduce the amount of information you get and to focus your search.

Example

- Broad– Foot health, foot injuries, neurological disorders
- Narrow– Hammer toes, claw toes, claw toe deformity
- The subject terms in the database thesaurus
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Databases</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who is interested in the topic?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Where are they published?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Doctors, Nurses, health consumers, addiction counselors, nutritionists</td>
<td>◦ Medical information in Medline/Pubmed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Nursing information in CINAHL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Consumer information in Medline Plus (on the Internet)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Psychology in PsycInfo</td>
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Deciding on a Question

- Through the process of reading what the scholars are saying you will arrive at a specific research question.
- Now your search will be much more focused.
Keep a research journal
- Write down each search—where you looked, what words you used and how much you found.
- Keep a list of citations— you will want them later for your reference list.
- Keep adding to your list of search terms
- Look at the reference lists of the articles you find— they will lead you to more articles on your topic.
- Ask for help.
- When you are finished assess how it went and what you can do better for the next project.
The search process can be emotional! It is normal to be frustrated, overwhelmed and confused at times. Hang in there! It will turn to confidence and satisfaction. (Kuhlthau, 2004)
And you will finally finish...

Celebrate!
You worked hard to get here!!

For additional Tips and Help go to:
http://libguides.vancouver.wsu.edu/nursing