Big Picture Topic:

Preliminary Research Question(s):

Breakdown of topic:

Use the back of this paper to draw a “research web” like we did in class

What did you decide was the heart of your research inquiry?

What are some KEYWORDS to start your first round of targeted searching?

_________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________
_________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________
_________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________ AND/OR/NOT ___________________

Are you determining any SUBJECTS from your searching that can help root your research (ex. HISTORY—20th Century—Boston)? Write some of the useful ones here so you can come back to them later.

What are some key concepts that you are discovering?

Have you determined any key authors in the field (This can often be determined through the review of literature section of a research paper. This section will discuss the current state of the field and many of the important studies that the authors are building on)?

Have you discovered any key publications?
ID need and Scope: What do you need to find, understand, and produce? What is your model?

Prior knowledge: What do you already know about the field?

Research questions and brainstorming: Be nimble and think through where some interesting questions lie.

Heart of the problem: What is really the main point, the kernel, of what you’re researching?

Rephrasing: What are the alternate ways of phrasing your search to find more material?

Wikipedia, Google, etc.: What can you glean from the general knowledge about your topic?

Keywords and synonyms: What are the simple phrases that best describe what you’re looking for?

Targeted searching: Determine the SUBJECT information on your topic to explore and dive deeper

Revision/trial and error: This is a multi-step process and will take a lot of revision. Usually rethinking keywords.

Read: The more you read, the more sophisticated your searching will become. This is a crucial step in finding material.

Analyze: Scrutinize and interrogate what you find. Does it hold? What questions do you have of the material?

Synthesize: Think through the author’s thesis and boil their work down to drill their work into your research. Be critical.

Where does your topic fit in with your field?: Make a case for your research and find its place. Revision is important.

ID related topics: Are there fields that can help you in your research? What are those? How far do you need to go?

ID related works and authors: Find the authorities in the field as well as subsequent or superseding work

Hypothesis and new research questions: With this round of research, where do you stand? What are your questions now?

Start again!: You now have a much more sophisticated understanding of your topic. Keep going!
Pro Tips!

When searching in the databases, it is good to know a few tricks that can help you find what you’re looking for

- Using an * asterisk at the end of a search will allow the system to search all possible endings for that word.
  - Ex. Search librar* and the system will find all assoc. with librarians, libraries, library, etc.
- Putting your search in quotation marks “___” tells the system to search for that phrase exactly as is. This is good for title searching or compound phrases
  - Ex. “the problems of philosophy” will bring back the specific book by Bertrand Russell first, not books dealing with the problems in philosophy.
  - Ex. “writer’s block” will search for the combined phrase as opposed to the two distinct words.
- Remember the difference between SUBJECTS (specialized vocabulary, system defined, and taxonomic) and KEYWORDS (author/publisher defined, more like ‘tags’ in social media).
- Using AND to combine concepts (Students AND test anxiety), OR to broaden the scope of your search (Students OR Adolescents), and NOT to limit your search (Students NOT K-12) will help sort through a lot of the results and help narrow what you find. Be careful, however, as you can be too specific and miss important materials.
- Remember to use the database limiters to help refine your search
- Think about what you’re looking for and search in the appropriate location (journals = databases, books= WorldCat/UBorrow).
- Make sure to use the appropriate search option (author name, title, keyword, subject, etc.) when searching.
- Check your Research Guides for additional help and don’t hesitate to ask a librarian!
- Make sure you’re accounting for all the time needed for a resources
  - Interlibrary Loan and UBorrow delivery times
  - Enough time to digest and really understand the work
  - Enough time to investigate more source; the research trail
  - Time to restart and rethink your idea!