

## Organizing a Research Project

- **What is Research?**
  - What is the Purpose?
    - Macro-level: to answer a question
    - Micro-level: to analyze and interpret data
  - What are the Tasks?
    - Develop a question
    - Determine how to answer the question
    - Determine what data to use
    - Determine which sources hold that data
- **How to Find a Research Question**
  - Read for background in general resources.
  - Identify a research topic.
  - Identify a puzzle or a silence.
  - Frame a research question.
- **How Do I Answer?**
  - Identify the key elements of your question.
  - Determine what information you would need to know to formulate a thoughtful response.
  - Think about what form that information might take.
- **Where Do I Find the Information?**
  - What sources might hold the information you need?
  - Will you need to collect your own information?
  - Plan to go to the library and take advantage of the reference librarians!

### Some Helpful Strategies for Organizing a Research Project

1. Assemble Sources and Interact With Them
  - a. Use bibliographies of articles and books to track down other sources
  - b. See what other articles might contain information relevant to your topic.
  - c. See which authors and articles are cited most often. This is a way of understanding which are considered credible sources in your field.
  - d. See how the conversation developed: follow the sources' chronology.
  - e. Skim the sources to evaluate whether or not they are on topic

2. Choose a System to Keep Track of Your Information
  - a. Consider double entry notes
  - b. Keep notes in separate notebooks or computer files
  - c. Use different colored inks for different categories
  - d. Write up summaries or abstracts of each source
  
3. Organize Your Ideas
  - a. Use an outline, map, flow-chart, or other visual aid to reveal the bare bones of your argument and their relationships to one another.
  - b. Take a few minutes to freewrite any parts that are proving difficult.
  - c. Think about the best order in which to present your ideas and the logical connections between them.
  - d. Use the system you have in your notes to connect your evidence/examples/etc. to the corresponding parts of your outline or flow chart.
  
4. Evaluate Your Argument
  - a. Make sure you know what your argument is.
  - b. Do you clearly state evidence that supports the claim or argument you've adopted?
  - c. Do you consider counterarguments?
  - d. Do you provide definitions of key terms?
  
5. Write It Down
  - a. Write your paper in the order in which it will make sense to the reader, NOT the order in which you found the information.
  - b. Think of your paper as a guided conversation with your reader.
  - c. Plan to write several drafts in which you gradually cut out all the information that your reader does not need to know.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **On Paraphrase and Summary:**

- <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/>
- <http://www.bridgewater.edu/WritingCenter/Workshops/summariztips.htm>
- <http://www.bridgewater.edu/WritingCenter/Workshops/paraphrastips.htm>

#### **Source Tracking Systems:**

- Endnote, ProCite, and Reference Manager
- <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/ppt/Endnote.pdf>

#### **Other Resources**

- Schedule regular Writing Studio appointments at <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>
- Check “Resources for Writers” at <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/index.html> for helpful links, and the library website for “research help”

**This handout is a collaborative effort of the Writing Studio and Duke Libraries.**