Transcript for Research Process Video

Welcome to the Mundt Library at Dakota State University. We are here to help you with all of your information needs whether it be research for a class or personal interest in a topic. If you have any questions, feel free to ask a librarian.

In this video you will be introduced to the research process. The learning objectives that will be addressed include an understanding that searching is not the same as researching and an understanding of the steps involved in research and how those steps are recursive rather than linear.

You are probably familiar with the process of conducting a search. You go to Google, type in your keyword, and the search is over. While this technique may work when your information need is shallow, it is not enough to write an in-depth college level research paper. Research as opposed to search requires consideration of how you conduct a search and how you evaluate and use your results. Research takes time and a plan.

Consider a recent research paper you were required to write. What were the steps you went through after receiving that assignment?

For many students their process goes something like this. 1. Procrastinate until the day before the paper is due. 2. Buy lots of coffee to pull an all-nighter. 3. Figure out your topic. 4. Find a reliable source to get all of your information. 5. Write your paper. 6. Proof read. 7. Create a works cited page. There are some bad points to this approach, numbers one and two for instance. But there are also some good points.

A more successful process follows. First define the problem. As this point you should consider the following points: what questions need to be answered, what information do you need, do you need to limit or broaden your topic, and what are the keywords you will use in your searches. The next step is to develop a strategy for finding the information. Do you need an overview of the topic? An encyclopedia would be useful. Do you need current information on the topic? Periodicals would be useful. Do you need comprehensive information on the topic? A book would be useful. Do you need other types of information? Visuals? Audio? Statistics? The third step is to locate the information. The library catalog can be used to find books. A periodical index database can be used to find journals, magazines, or newspapers. The internet can be used to find additional material. The fourth step is to evaluate and select materials. Sources should be judged for accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. You should also decide if you need more material. The final step is to use and synthesize the material to create a finished product. Make sure you use a consistent citation style and cite your sources to avoid plagiarism.

When you are conducting research, you cannot simply follow this process in a straight line checking off each step of the list. You often take steps backward and forward. In this way, research becomes a recursive process. For example, I develop a research question (step one), figure out a search strategy
(step two), and begin to locate information (step three). During the locating step, I discover some information that makes me want to take a slightly different approach, to ask a new or different question. Or I discover that the keywords I first searched were not producing the results I needed, so I use what I have learned so far to re-strategize and to rephrase my search to get better results.

When students have problems with their research, it is often for one of the following reasons. They do not spend enough time on step one - defining the problem. It is important to have a research focus before you start to look for information. Otherwise, you can get quickly bogged down in an overload of information. They skip step four – evaluate research sources. In order to write a quality research paper, you need quality sources. Evaluation is a must in looking at your sources. Or the students will not go back to lower steps. Sometimes the sources you find or do not find will require you to redefine your problem or revise your search strategy. This is not a failure. This is the exploratory nature of research.

You should also be aware that there are times when conducting research that you will experience frustration and stress. These are normal feelings that everyone experiences. It is important to work through these times.

A final tip when conducting research and a true key to success. Time. Make sure you give yourself enough time to be through and complete with your research. It is when you are in a hurry that shortcuts are taken and problems arise.

If you need assistance with any step in your research process whether it is figuring out keywords, evaluating a source, or creating a citation, feel free to contact a librarian. They will be happy to provide assistance.

This video provided an overview of the research process noting how the steps involved are recursive and require more time and critical thought than a simple search.