Library Research Process

When doing research on a topic, there is a basic system or process which you can use to gather the information you need.

1) Choosing the Topic
   a) Develop a clear idea of what information you are looking for
   b) Determine what type of information you are seeking: current, historical, or both
   c) Requirements of your project (course assignment, publication requirements)

2) Finding Background Information
   a) Gather background information in reference sources (general and specific) which provide a broad overview of the topic
      i) Important names, dates, events
      ii) Keywords and terms associated with topic
      iii) Additional sources from bibliographies

3) Refining the topic
   a) Broaden or limit the topic depending on the amount of information available
   b) Examine specific area or areas of the topic
   c) Searching for information can assist in providing ideas to limit or broaden topic

4) Selecting Resources
   a) Different types of resources may be more appropriate than others
   b) Awareness of what type of information is included in each type of resource
   c) Information timeline

5) Searching for Information
   a) In-depth information
      i) Online catalog, IUCAT, provides access to books, videos, and other library materials by keyword, author, title, and subject
      ii) Library of Congress Subject Headings are controlled vocabulary used in the online catalog
      iii) Library of Congress Classification system is used for call numbers in the Indiana University Libraries
   b) Current information
      i) Most recent information is located in periodicals – newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals
      ii) To access periodical articles use an index/abstract or database to locate articles
      iii) Each index/database may have controlled vocabulary specific to that index or database. Use thesaurus, descriptors, or subject indexes when available.
c) Expanding the search for information to other resources
   i) Be aware of specialized collections like government publications, primary
      source materials, maps, etc.
   ii) Resources noted in bibliographies may be available from other Indiana
       University Libraries and can be requested in the online catalog, IUCAT, by
       using the Request This button (Request Delivery). Additional materials may
       be available in other libraries through the interlibrary loan system (ILLiad).
   iii) Internet and the World Wide Web resources (Useful Reference Links)

6) Evaluating Resources
   a) Analyze resources
   b) Evaluating Information Sources handout

7) Citing Sources
   a) Documentation – use the required style manual or guide
   b) Plagiarism – Student Code of Ethics

Hints:
Work from general to specific
Document what you find and where – citations
Translate your topic – subject headings, descriptors (thesaurus)

Other guide:
http://guides.library.cornell.edu/sevensteps

Compiled from original 5 step research process guide done by Jeff Coon and other guides noted in preparation for a
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