**Stage One of Research Process:  Focus and Bibliography**

**Due Date:**

The focus is a **minimum** one paragraph outline of your topic.  Include in this outline your topic range, questions you are asking yourself, points that you find interesting and subtopics or arguments you may pursue. Finally, if you are ready to present a preliminary thesis or theses, include these now as well.  The more you are able to develop this focus, the more input I will be able to give you.

In order to do the **focus**, you have to do some research.  Please include with the focus, a **brief bibliography** that includes at least 5 sources.  **Use the Chicago Style guide to do the bibliography properly.**

Choose 2 -3 topics from the topic list that interest you and do some preliminary research to get a broad overview of each topic.

**Stage #1 - Getting an overview:**

Use your textbook; this is the most logical place to start

In the Library, look for other texts that may be relevant.  Use the footnotes and endnotes in general texts to find more specific sources

Internet sources: to begin your research, please refer to the Research Skills Guide to determine what are valid and reliable digital resources.  For this research paper, I encourage you to use the databases to research magazine, newspaper and journal articles or to use government websites. However, there will be other websites that may be legitimate sources of evidence.  To determine their validity and legitimacy, check the Research Skills Guide or see Mrs. Wright.

Familiarize yourself with the topic and start to think about the issues within your topic

Remember an essay is written to persuade and not to tell a story. When you research your topic look for “a hook” or something(s) that are contradictory, controversial, debated about your topic.  This will help you to begin to formulate your thesis. The thesis statement is the focus of your essay; it is the central organizing idea of the essay. Your thesis states a clear position.  It must be **provable and arguable.**  It must be **researchable** and it **must be worth proving**. The thesis cannot be self evident; it will need to be proven with a carefully planned structure of ideas supported by evidence. Remember, however, that while your original thesis will change as you do more research, you need to start with a general thesis to direct that research.

**Navigating the Internet to do Research**

In order to begin researching on the internet one must consider a search engine (ie Google, Yahoo!, Bing) in order to sort through the internet to find websites related to the topic. Note that **search engines are not sources**, but a means to find websites. Now that a list of related websites has been found, you need to decide which ones to use in order to obtain the desired information. The most difficult aspect of internet research is sifting through the plethora of information presented. Simply typing in a few words into the search box will likely present a plethora of information which could take a lifetime to sift through. Make your searching more effective by using the **advance search functions**. This will allow you to search by; exact phrases, any words, all words and even omitting words. These simple modifications will greatly narrow down the search results and help you to focus on specific information. It is also beneficial to continually update your search. As information related you topic is found, your search should be modified to include new terms in order to find more information. The information you are looking for may be out there but that will not matter if you are unable to find it. You need to evaluate which websites are credible and reliable for use in your project.

The most important consideration for evaluating a website is the author. Websites can be created by anyone, regardless of background, and without any check on the information. As well, there are many Wiki sites, that allow information to be posted and edited by it users, and discussion forums, where anyone can add information related to a particular topic. Since it is impossible to verify the credentials of those posting information on **wikis and discussion sites,** they **should not be used as a reliable source**, and therefore not recorded on you bibliography. They may be of some value to obtain relevant terms and possible additional research links, but remember that you need to do additional research.

Before you can use a website as a research source you need to **evaluate** it for **reliability** (the extent to which the information is accurate) and **credibility** (the provider of the information has some level of recognized expertise in the subject). When evaluating at a site, you should be able to determine:

* **Author** ~ Who is the posting the information - is it an individual, an institution, an organization or a company/corporation? What credentials does the author/institution have? Is it clearly stated if it is not obvious? *If your website does not indicate a clear, credible author, it is not a useful source.*
* **Date** ~ When was the source written/produced? How current is it? When was it last updated? Is your topic time sensitive? *Question the reliability and credibility of sites that do not include dates anywhere.*

The final challenge of researching on the internet is properly citing your sources. It can be rather difficult to determine the information required and where to place it. You should strive to find: author, article title, publishing institution, URL, and date updated. You may not be able to find all of this information (in which case you should consider the reliability of the site) and so may need to modify your citation.

If there is no author, the publisher may be used (provided it is credible) instead. There may not be an article and website title, in which case you only use one. ***You should also only use a date accessed as a last resort. See Mrs. Wright if this is the case.*** Ensure that you include the URL linking to the specific information. If you have any questions you should always speak with your teacher.