Getting Started
After carefully reading the assignment, choose a topic that is interesting to you! The entire research process will be better if you start with something you're interested in. Need help generating ideas? These library databases are a great place to explore current issues:

CQ Researcher
Opposing Viewpoints in Context

To focus your topic you may want to consider specific examples, time periods, people/groups, historical events, or geographical locations that are related. Consider cause and effect and connections that you can make. Take some time to brainstorm and develop your research question; it's the driving force of your research.

This is also a good time to generate keywords. Think about the main concepts of your topic and brainstorm synonyms and related terms. You'll use these keywords to search for information (a.k.a. your search strategy).

You'll also want to find background information so that you can familiarize yourself with the topic and identify additional keywords. Try this online reference collection to find background information on your topic:

Gale Virtual Reference Library

Finding Sources
You will need to find a variety of sources to answer your research question. Start your research from the library website.

Use the library catalog to search for books and eBooks (and videos)! Start with one or two keywords to find books on your subject.

Use the library databases to find articles on your topic. The following databases are a good place to start:

Academic Search Premier
JSTOR

Need scholarly articles? Check the peer reviewed box to narrow your search to scholarly academic journal articles.

The library also has a tool that allows you to search all of our databases and our catalog with one search. You'll likely find a ton of results, so use the filters on the left to narrow your search by source type (books, academic journals, news, etc.), and publication date.
You'll want to keep track of your successful searches. If you find a relevant source, take a look at the item's record and see what subject terms are used. These might be good terms to add to your search. Also, check the article's references to find even more articles and books on your topic. Search for these titles with OneSearch and follow the conversation!

Evaluating Sources

In addition to using library resources, you'll probably find some information online. You'll want to make sure you evaluate your sources to make sure they are appropriate for college-level research. Here are some questions to consider:

1. Who is the author of the source? Are they an expert?
2. What is the purpose of the source? Why was it created?
3. When was it created and has it been updated?
4. Where can the information be verified. Check the references.
5. Why would you choose this source instead of another? Keep the context in mind.

Citing Sources

Finally you'll need to cite your sources. Your instructor might require a specific citation style so check your assignment/with your instructor first (it's probably MLA, APA, or Chicago). To create your citations you can use the official style guides (available for use in the library), free online guides, or citation generators (many databases have them).

If you are using a lot of sources, try a citation management tool such as RefWorks to keep them organized.

Librarians can help you with every step of the research process. Just ask a librarian!

We've also created subject research guides and other tools to help you with your research.

Research Guides
Assignment Calculator
Project Starters

Happy searching!