**Tips for Conducting General Interest Research**

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**Introduction**

Independently researching topics of interest is an invaluable skill to grow as you graduate from university. York provides many tools for an in-depth examination of your subjects of interest, and after you graduate you will find similar resources in a good, public reference library. After developing an idea of the topic you wish to research (e.g., sector, industry or organization (SIO), issue or problem), it is important to review the literature that is out there about the topic.

York faculty and administrators have put together discipline-specific research guides for this purpose. These guides provide practices for disciplines and subjects, journal article databases, industry and sector information, government sources, and data and statistics to support whatever it is you are researching.

**Step 1: Developing driving questions for your research**

There are unlimited topics to study, so the key to manageable research is to have a narrow research question. A good place to begin is to have a [driving question](https://spark.library.yorku.ca/choosing-a-topic-creating-a-working-thesis/) that you will narrow down to a specific research question as you learn more about a topic.

For example, let's say you are interested in exploring work done in Toronto to benefit marginalized communities. Some initial guiding questions that you could ask yourself are:

* What challenges are marginalized communities facing in Toronto?
* In what ways are marginalized communities disproportionately impacted compared to other communities in Toronto?
* What policies exist that aid in addressing, or exacerbate, the challenges marginalized communities in Toronto are experiencing?
* What organizations are working to address some of the challenges marginalized communities are experiencing in Toronto?

**Step 2: Exploring news and research publications**

After you have some driving questions for what you would like to research, you need to explore what people are saying about this topic. The [guide to finding journal articles at York libraries](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/journalarticles) is a convenient place to begin this process. One of the first things this guide recommends is to find a database that is relevant to your subject area. York has put together a descriptive [database](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/az.php) of all available research on specific topics. York's online library also offers [subject-based research guides](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/) to find relevant articles and resources in the research field of your course.

* For example, let’s say your course on marginalized communities in Toronto is within the human rights and equity discipline. A good first step would be to select the [Social Sciences](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/) dropdown menu in the research guide and click the "Human Rights and Equity" tab. Here you can find discipline-specific articles, databases, and research tips.

News articles are also a great way of keeping up to date on current events that may positively or negatively impact your field of interest. York's online library offers a [newspaper guide](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/news) to aid you in exploring reputable news publications.

* For example, one database that you may find useful as you engage with [Envision YU](https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/envisionyu/front-matter/introduction/) content is [Factiva](https://ocul-yor.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_YOR/vg268k/alma991024678859705164). Factiva is an archive of news articles, industry publications, and reports that, while often focused on business, also provide insights into current events, and shifts in policy.

**Step 3: Exploring organizational influences**

One of your driving questions is to explore how Toronto organizations engage with your interest area. Different organizations and fields of interest will have differing social, political, and economic influences that guide their operations. York's online library provides research guides for exploring industries, companies, and non-profits.

* For example, when crafting driving questions, you determine that you would like to explore what organizations are doing to address the challenges that marginalized communities face in Toronto. In this scenario, York's online library guide to researching [non-profits](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/NonprofitResearch) may be valuable for your research.

**Step 4: Curate your list of references**

References are a necessity for keeping the information you have collected organized. There are many different styles for citing scientific works, which are often a matter of preference by discipline. The York library offers [reference style guides](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/styleguides) on properly citing your sources, which will help you find these again if needed, or share them with others.

**Tips for Success**

* If you are having difficulty beginning the research process, [SPARK](https://spark.library.yorku.ca/) offers a useful guide to writing papers and academic research useful in non-academic research.
* The [Learning Commons](https://learningcommons.yorku.ca/) is another service on campus to help you through the research process.
* As you begin to write about your research topic, the [Writing Centre](https://writing-centre.writ.laps.yorku.ca/) is an invaluable service to enhance academic and professional writing.
* [York’s librarians are available for any questions about researching a topic of interest.](https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/)