

I. Defining Your Topic

Assume you are thinking about writing a paper concerning *The Nurse's Role in Caring for Cancer Patients*. You may want to define the scope of your paper by defining what constitutes nursing care as it relates to cancer patients.

A. Looking for Ideas

If you don't know what constitutes care for *Cancer Patients*, you may want to do some preliminary searches and read articles and books on your topic.

For example, when using *ProQuest's Nursing Collection* online database, first of all you need to click on *Collections*, and then choose *ProQuest Nursing Journals*. Then, you need to use the *advanced word search* feature, and set dates from *January 1, 2000 to the present* along with limiting your search to *Citations and Abstracts*.

Type:

Cancer and Nursing

You will retrieve varying numbers of articles according to the search choices you have made.

OR, you may prefer to do a subject search in the Library's online catalog under *Cancer---Nursing*.

After scanning through some articles and books you should be able to come up with some preliminary ideas about how you would like to explore your topic. If you have questions, the librarians in the Reference Department will be glad to help you. Or you can send e-mails or chat online via the *Ask a Librarian* service located on the Library's Web Page. In addition, you may also want to consult your instructor as well.

B. Topic too Broad or too Narrow?

In the event that you find too much information on your topic, you might want to narrow your topic. For example, in *ProQuest's Nursing Collection*, you may find **814** full-text, peer-reviewed articles relating to **Cancer and Nursing**. You may want to limit your search further by restricting your topic to a certain area such as **Nursing and**

Cancer and Patient Care. If you still pull up too many articles, you might want to limit your search to a certain time period such as **2000 to present**, use medically specific terms such as **palliative care, neoplasms** or a specific type of cancer such as **breast cancer**.

If you only find a few sources, you might want to broaden your topic by expanding your time frame or by dropping a search term, or using general terms such as patient care, and terminal illnesses. In addition, you may want to expand your topic by using related terms, or by looking at the keywords found in articles you retrieve. Furthermore, you can always use the list of references found at the end of articles to gather more ideas as to where to search.

C. What Do I Want to Find Out About My Topic?

When you ask yourself what you need to learn about your topic, be sure to state the research topic as a question. Stating your topic as a question may help you stay within the scope or boundaries of your topic. For example, ***what is the nurse's role in caring for cancer patients?***

D. What Types of Information Do I Need?

The type of information you will need will depend on the following factors:

- ***Type of Assignment*** - Is your research project culminating in a presentation, term paper, senior project, thesis or dissertation?
- ***Amount of Information*** – How much information and/or data do you need for your assignment?
- ***Currency of Information*** – Does your project require the most current information available, historical, or some of both?
- ***Type of Resources Needed*** – Should your research focus mainly on scholarly and professional journals only?
- ***Primary vs. Secondary Resources*** – Should your information come from primary or secondary resources; or a combination of both?
- ***Information in Various Formats*** – Should your research focus on mainly print resources; or can you include other formats such as visual/graphic, numeric (statistics), audio, and/or electronic sources?