DEVELOPING A SEARCH STRATEGY/LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Pick a topic.
   a. Break your topic down into sub-topics.
   b. Think of other terms or words that can be used to describe your topic.
   c. Reading an overview of your topic in a subject encyclopedia or handbook can help you with a) and b) and may give you a broader range of results.

2. Do a preliminary search to make sure there is enough information available on your topic and that the information is at an appropriate level for the type of paper you need to produce.
   a. Plan ahead and budget your time.
   b. If you need to request materials that are not available at your library, you need to allow enough time to receive these items, review the items after they arrive, and incorporate the information from these items into your paper.

3. Database/Search Engine choices—make sure you are searching in the right places for your topic. Boise State University gives you access to over 300 databases.
   a. Consult a librarian.
   b. Ask your professor.
   c. Check a library guide.

4. Keep a search log of which sources you have checked and which subject headings or search terms you checked in those sources (and which of the subject headings and search terms yielded results in which source).

5. Take good bibliographic notes on all your sources.
   a. Consult the appropriate style manual (assigned by your instructor) to identify the proper way to document your sources.

6. Evaluate your sources.
   a. All periodical articles are not created equal. The hierarchy of information reliability—
      i. The least reliable, least desirable sources for scientific research are newspapers; popular periodicals such as Time and Newsweek; blogs, tweets and other social media; commercial sites on the Internet. Generally you won’t use these resources in your research.
      ii. One step up from popular sources are encyclopedias, textbooks, and subject specific news magazines or newsletters. These sources can be useful for background reading to familiarize yourself with a topic that is unfamiliar.
iii. Literature reviews/systematic reviews are great places to get lists of sources on your topic. You won’t want to use the review as a source in your paper, but the sources that the reviews list can be tracked down and used in your own research. Most of these sources should be original research articles.

iv. Original research articles are articles that report on the research performed by a person or group of people. This research may take the form of a survey; a case report; a case-control study; a cross-sectional study; a cohort study; or a randomized controlled trial. An original research article should have an abstract, a section on methodology, results, a conclusion and a list of references or sources.

v. The very best of the original research articles are published in peer reviewed journals. These articles represent the top 10% of research articles published. Peer reviewed journals are also known as refereed journals.

b. All authors are not created equal. You may wish to check the authority/expertise of the author by checking if their degree matches the subject of their paper. You can also check book reviews or other external sources for more information about the article.

c. When using web sources keep the following in mind –
   i. Periodicals published in electronic form on the web are not technically speaking, web-sites.
   ii. Just because something is on the World Wide Web does not always make it accurate.
   iii. Always check web-sites for sponsor information and carefully investigate the bias and objectivity exhibited, plus cross-check the information for accuracy.
   iv. The URL can indicate reliability--.edu sites are for colleges, universities and other educational entities; .gov sites are government sites and are good for statistics; .org sites are for organizations and you need to know about the organization in order to decide reliability; .net sites are networks and you need to know who is running the network and why it exists; .com sites are commercial sites and generally are trying to sell you something.