**Researching and Drafting**

Devoting sufficient time to researching and drafting is an essential part of an effective writing process. Depending on the assignment, you might need to spend a lot of time searching for relevant literature as part of your research. We have created specific guides on Finding Sources and Literature Searches and Identifying Different Types of Sources that will help you in these instances.

In this resource, we outline a few other tips to help you research and then draft your material most effectively.

**Researching**

1. Set aside plenty of time to research your topic in detail, but split your research into manageable chunks. For example, set yourself a goal of finding four or five useful primary sources each time you perform a literature search and then take a break. You are likely to be more successful this way than trying to find all you need in one mammoth session online.
2. Try to only look for (and use) the most recent sources to answer the assignment question. This is a golden tip in all forms of science writing, and even more so in popular writing such as newspaper articles, blog posts and press releases. Scientific thinking changes over time as knowledge builds and opinions shift, so it is important to be sure you are working with the latest material. When performing literature searches, you should start off by searching only in the last few years, before expanding that time if required.
3. It is often fine to use tertiary sources such as Wikipedia to help give you *general background* information, just as long as you then find the original sources and check your facts before assuming everything you have read is accurate. Lists of sources appear at the end of Wikipedia articles, and these are often of use when researching topics.
4. Use your writing centre tutors and/or librarians \* to help you draw up a research plan and then use the services available to find your information. Bear in mind that if your assignment is going to be completed by a large number of classmates, your graders are likely to read similar answers again and again. By using a wider range of search facilities, you are likely to find extra information from sources that others will miss, and this should help your writing stand out.

\* Note that writing tutors are a great first port of call to help you get your ideas in order, and to help you decide what it is you want to research. However, librarians are the masters of research, so booking an appointment with one who has expertise in science-related materials is a great idea. This UBC library resource contains other helpful hints for research.

1. Make short, annotated summaries of all the sources you find, as you find them. This will help you hugely when it comes to the next stages of writing, and will save you re-reading the same sources again and again to remember exactly what information each one contained. It is very difficult to recall which sources contain specific information once you have read a few, but it only takes a few minutes to write a little summary for each useful one you find.

**After Researching But Before Drafting**

There is a very important intermediate step before you set about drafting your piece of writing; this is to create a writing outline that will help guide your drafting. We have created a specific resource for this (see here), as well as a video that summarises some of the main concepts.

Once you have created your writing outline, you should use it to help you draft your initial piece of writing.

**Drafting**

1. Again, set aside sufficient time to complete your first draft, and try to do so in one sitting if possible. By using your writing outline and the summaries you created for each piece of literature you found, you should find this easier than you might fear. Remember that your first draft is about getting all of your ideas onto paper in some logical structure, but it doesn’t need to be perfect at this stage. You will edit at a later stage.
2. Try to make sure that whatever you write is balanced in terms of the content depth and length. For example, if you are asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of something, try not to draft an answer that focuses on one side considerably more than the other.
3. Don’t worry about your grammar and the little mechanics of your writing at this stage, but do worry about the content and the logic. You will find that editing will be significantly easier if the logical structure of your piece is already well defined after you have completed your first draft. Don’t be afraid to explain what seems to be obvious to make sure a reader will understand why you are introducing certain points when you do.
4. Make sure you use citations when drafting that appropriately represent the sources you have used. Even if you devise some abbreviated style of referencing for this first draft, it is important that you include this information rather than leaving it for later edits. It will take more time in the long-run if you leave it for the edit, and you will also risk misrepresenting sources as you tweak certain phrasing as part of the natural editing process.
5. Take at least 24 hours off after completing your first draft so that you can begin the editing and redrafting process with a fresh mind. Remember that it is common to produce multiple drafts before settling on a version that you will hand in, and that the biggest key to success is allowing enough time to get through each revision.