

# AN343: conducting preliminary research

Hello AN343 students.

My name is Peter, and I'm the Anthropology librarian.

In this brief video I'd like to give you some suggestions for conducting some preliminary research for your research proposal.

Your syllabus indicates that the research proposal should explain the topic you wish to explore, it's background and significance, and the literature you'll enter into dialogue with.

I'll be concentrating on those criteria in this exercise.

It's important to note that when starting out, many students encounter problems by choosing a topic that's too narrow, or by trying to answer a question that's difficult, or impossible, to answer using the available research.

One of the ways people find a topic is through their course notes and readings.

I'll use the example of shantytowns in Latin America.

I found this topic in Chapter two of your course reading, *The Anthropology of Latin America and the Caribbean*.

In this chapter, the author states that "shantytowns...are stunning features of Latin American urban landscapes."

I thought this was an interesting topic to do further research on.

Next, I want to do some additional research to find sub-themes in the scholarly literature and ensure there is enough material for me to draw on.

I'll start at the library homepage, [library.wlu.ca](http://library.wlu.ca)

Next, I'll click on the Research tab in the top menu, then select Subject Guides.

Next, I'll select Anthropology.

I'm interested in research through an Anthropological lens or disciplinary focus.

Using databases on this page helps us to focus on the anthropological literature.

I'll click on Anthropology Plus.

Now I'll do a simple search on shantytown\*

The \* at the end of the word is a truncation operator.

This searches for spelling variants, like shantytown, or shantytowns.

We can limit to peer-reviewed articles, from academic journals.

One way to refine results and note themes is by browsing the titles in your results list, or by reading the abstract or summary of each article.

Another way is to scroll to the Subject filter in the left side menu.

Clicking Show more gives us a list of subject specific terms that appear in each article's record.

Subthemes appear here such as "urban poor," "violence," "children," and so on.

Specific geographies emerge here that might be worth noting, such as South America, Central America, and individual countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico.

These Subjects also are a good place to look for related subject terms to add to our search, like "squatter settlements."

We're doing a fairly broad search at this point to allow you to explore sub-themes and topics.

Try a similar search on your topic in different databases on the Anthropology Subject page.

Abstracts in Anthropology and AnthroSource are two excellent additional databases to search in, and you'll likely get different results.

JSTOR, further down the page, is a good general database with broad coverage that you might want to try.

Our initial search run in AnthroSource yields 506 results.

In this case, it might be a good idea to add in a specific geographical term or terms, such as "Latin America," or perhaps specific countries in the region.

Experiment a bit!

Try different terms, and geographies, and see what you find.

During my in-class session with you all, we'll look at more advanced techniques to find precise results and manage them efficiently.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

My contact information is found at the left side of this course guide.