

TRW Research Journal

College level research can sometimes seem daunting. Breaking the research process down into individual steps can help make it more manageable without getting overwhelmed. This Research Journal will guide you through each step of the process, from the beginning stages of developing your topic all the way down to documenting your sources in your final draft.

Don't be afraid to ask questions as you work through each entry of your journal; your instructor and class librarian are here to help and will provide feedback along the way.

*Note that we have used the topic of **book bans** for our examples. Your research, however, will include a topic of your choice.*

Table of Contents:

[Journal Entry 1: Background Information Gathering & Concept Mapping](#)

[Journal Entry 2: Brainstorming a Research Topic](#)

[Journal Entry 3: Types of Sources](#)

[Journal Entry 4: Search Strategies](#)

[Journal Entry 5: Critical Reading & Evaluating for Relevance](#)

[Journal Entry 6: Citing Your Sources](#)

[Journal Entry 7: Reflecting on the Research Process](#)



Journal Entry 1: Background Information Gathering & Concept Mapping

Intro:

Now that you have read *The Message*, you may have a topic in mind to use in your Letter to Coates assignment. Perhaps you are not familiar with all aspects of the topic. This is your opportunity to gather some background information. Don't worry if your research topic feels broad at this point because you will need to get a working knowledge of your topic before you can focus on a more narrowed question.

Not sure where to start? Try our library tool [Points of View](#), Wikipedia, or a Google search.

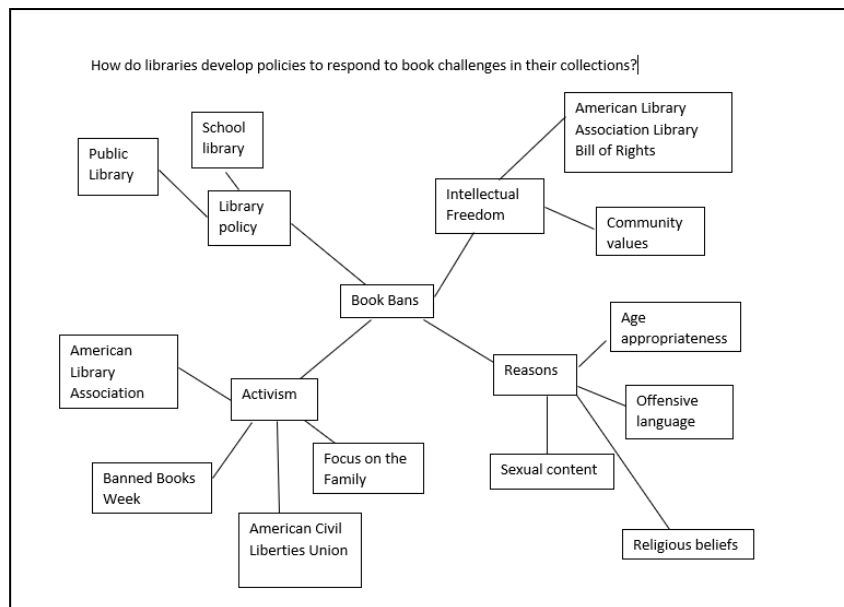
Once you've done a little background research, let's map what you know about your topic so far through concept mapping. This is a brainstorming exercise to help you generate and organize ideas for your topic using a concept or bubble map. A concept map is a visual representation of the relationships between different words, concepts, or ideas. You can see a few examples of concept maps at the end of this entry.

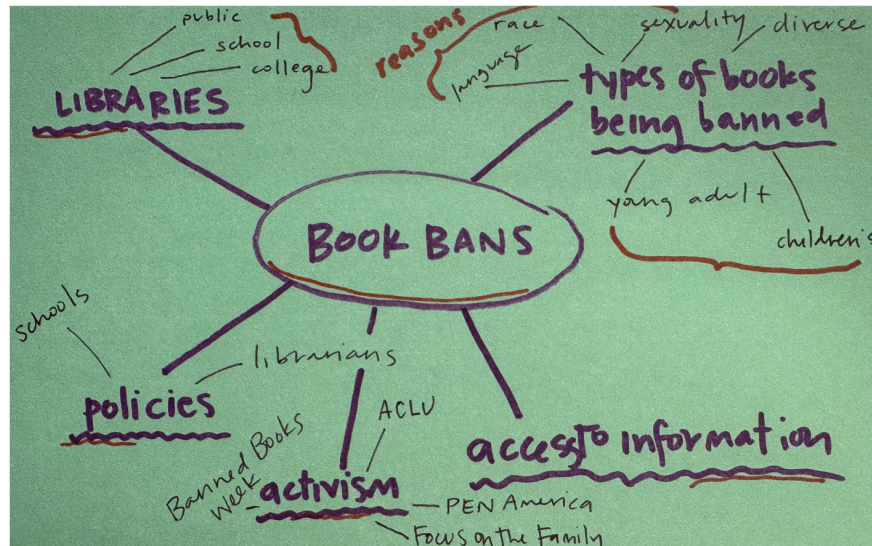
Action:

For this Journal Entry, you have two options:

1. To make a map on your computer, open the [concept map template](#), and print out a copy or make a copy in google docs
2. Or to make a hand-drawn concept map, get a pen, pencil, or some markers and a piece of paper

Sample maps:





Then on your chosen format:

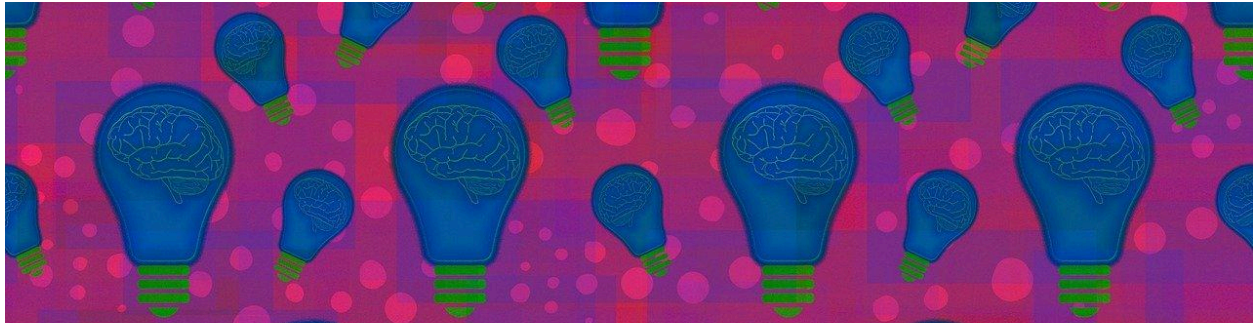
1. Put your topic or question in the center bubble, as in the examples above.
2. In the surrounding bubbles, write down ideas and concepts associated with your topic, grouping them around themes. Draw lines between related concepts.
3. You can add more bubbles or branch from a bubble – if you are completing this in a word/google doc, just add circles, lines, and textboxes to add to the map.
4. Have at least three separate bubbles for your topic but use as many as you need. (Remember, you can draw more bubbles on the worksheet).

Questions to consider for your concept map:

- What do you know about your topic already?
- Who are the stakeholders or people who are impacted by your topic?
- Are there various points-of-view represented by the stakeholders? (Hint: There should be.)
- What are subtopics within your topic that you could unpack or examine?
- Are there any other ways to describe any of the words you've placed on your concept map?
- What questions do you have about your project/topic?

Once you have your bubble map completed, take a picture, copy and paste it into the research journal below. You can use it to develop search terms and search strategies when you start searching for sources for your paper/project in later journal entries.

Journal Entry 2: Brainstorming a Research Topic



Intro:

Now that you've brainstormed some topics/subtopics, you are ready to narrow your topic to help focus your Letter to Coates and to later help guide your search for sources. It is normal for your research topic to evolve as you move through the research process. While you are not writing a research paper, it is still helpful to have a specific focus when writing your letter. So if your topic is book banning, you might focus on one cause, one impact, or one solution.

Action:

In this journal entry:

1. Complete the [From Topic to Research Question tutorial](#)
2. Then refer back to your concept from Journal Entry 1 to identify three possible research questions/topics you would like to explore for your Letter to Coates and complete the chart below, reflecting on the broader issue, the underlying problems, and the significance to the community.

Example Broad Topic

- **Book Bans**

Underlying issue <i>Why is this topic important? Why should people care about this issue?</i>	Impact <i>Who does this issue affect? Does it impact some groups more than others?</i>	Research Topic or Question (Narrower) <i>What aspect of your broader topic do you want to focus on? Try wording it as a question.</i>
Book bans limit people's access to information and ideas.	Everyone - children, young adults, adults.	How do book bans impact children's exposure to diverse perspectives?

Your Broad Topic

- What is the issue or overall topic that interests you?
 -

Next, complete the table with at least 3 subtopics from your concept map:

Underlying issue <i>Why is this topic important?</i> <i>Why should people care about this issue?</i>	Impact <i>Who does this issue affect? Does it impact some groups more than others?</i>	Research Topic or Question (Narrower) <i>What aspect of your broader topic do you want to focus on? Try wording it as a question.</i>

Journal Entry 3: Types of Sources



Intro:

In Journal Entry 2 you may have consulted some sources to give you background information on your topic but that is not the only role that sources play in your research. They also give you evidence to support your arguments, examples of your topic in action, a framework to critically analyze a topic, or a solution to propose to address the topic at hand.

Action:

For this journal entry, complete the [Identifying and Selecting Sources](#) tutorial, and then examine the sources linked below to answer a few questions about how they support the sample research question.

For this activity you'll work with our sample topic in order to gain the skills to later apply to your own research topic.

Reviewing Sources

Example research question: What is the impact of book bans in school libraries on students' access to diverse perspectives?

After **skimming** each source (you don't need to read them in depth), explain how you would use each source in your assignment. For example, would it provide background information? Evidence for an argument you are making? A solution you are proposing? *Note: there is not one right answer, what's important is your reasoning.*

How would you use [Source A](#)?

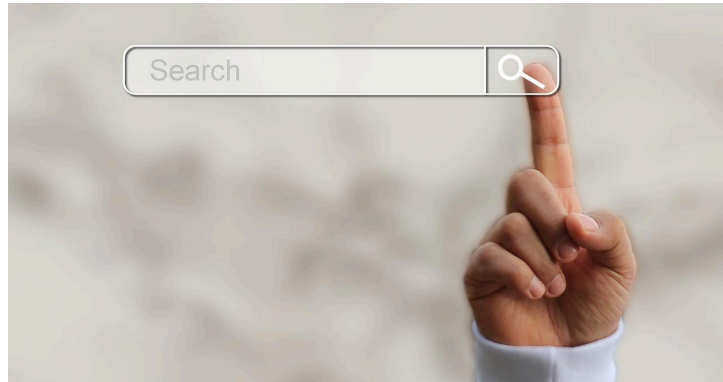
How would you use [Source B](#)?



How would you use [Source C](#)?

How would you use [Source D](#)?

Journal Entry 4: Search Strategies



Intro:

Now that you know some different types of sources, it's time to do some searching on your own topic!

Action:

For this journal entry:

1. Complete the [Basic Search Strategies](#) tutorial.
2. Then brainstorm some keywords and **find at least 3 sources** by searching [LibSearch](#), Google, and a [subject database](#).

Record your work below:

Example:

Research topic or question: What is the impact of book bans in school libraries on students' access to diverse perspectives?		
Concept 1 Keywords: libraries		
Concept 2 Keywords: primary OR elementary school OR middle school OR high school		
Concept 3 Keywords: book bans OR book challenges OR book censorship		
Search strategy: Searched in LibSearch, Google, & Academic Search Premier. Limited search results to articles/books published in the last 10 years.		
Copy & paste citations or links for sources below:	Where did you find this source?	Why did you choose it?

Alter, A. (2024). School librarian has her say on book bans. <i>New York Times</i> , 173(60267), C1–C6.	Academic Search Premier	This newspaper article provides a first hand account of a school librarian dealing with the repercussions of speaking out against book banning.
McGehee, M., & Chrastka, J. (2025). Parent Perceptions of Book Bans, Materials Selection, and Reading in School Libraries and Public Libraries. <i>Public Library Quarterly</i> , 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2025.2496591	LibSearch	This journal article presents the findings of a survey of parents to gauge their views of public and school libraries. It provides evidence that I can use to support my argument.
American Library Association. (2025). Top 10 most challenged books. https://www.ala.org/news/2025/04/american-library-association-kicks-national-library-week-top-10-most-challenged-books	Google	This is from a trusted organization and provides an overview of the topic along with statistics on the number of book challenges and books commonly banned.
<p>What additional keywords or related concepts did you find as you explored the databases? I originally only used the keywords book ban, but as I looked at results I noticed that using the more specific keywords - like book challenges or censorship - could help retrieve additional results.</p>		

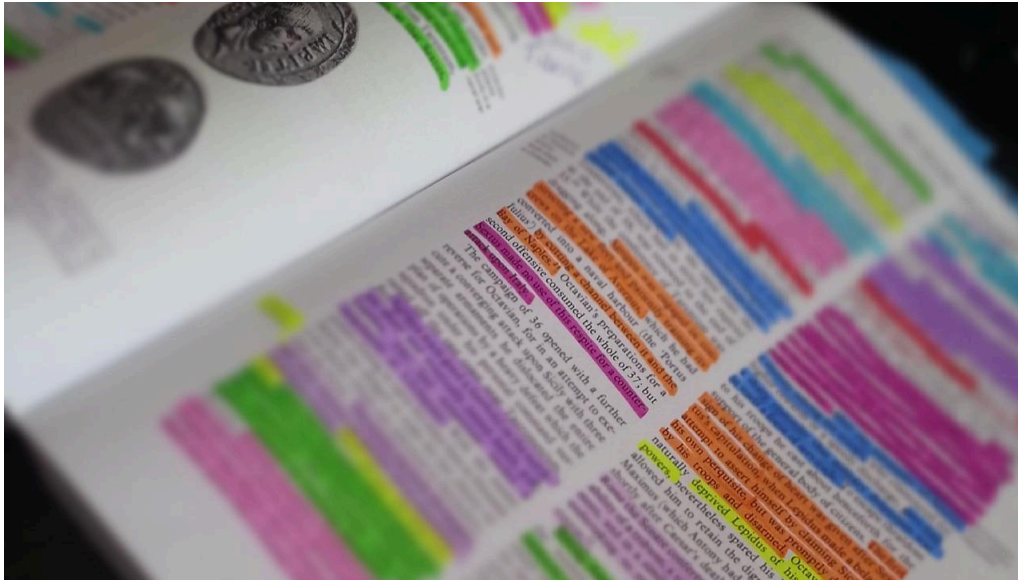
Your topic:

Research topic or question:		
Concept 1 Keywords:		
Concept 2 Keywords:		
Concept 3 Keywords:		
Search strategy:		
Copy & paste citations or links for sources below:	Where did you find this source?	Why did you choose it?



What additional keywords or related concepts did you find as you explored the databases?

Journal Entry 5: Critical Reading & Evaluating for Relevance



Intro:

As you learned in Journal Entry 4, different sources serve different purposes. Instructors will ask you to use a variety of sources in your research, and will often require that you use a certain number of *scholarly* sources. Reading scholarly sources can sometimes be intimidating, but there are strategies you can use, as described in the video you will watch for this journal entry.

Action:

1. First, watch [How to Quickly Scan & Evaluate a Scholarly Article](#).
2. Then, compare the two sources linked below to identify some key characteristics of both source types and reflect on their similarities and differences, and when you might employ one source over the other. Utilize some of the strategies recommended in the tutorial for reading a scholarly source.

Source Comparison

Access the first article [here](#). Use the strategies from the tutorial to scan the article - you do not need to read it in-depth.

1. What kind of information can you find about the author(s) of the article?
2. Find the abstract/summary and quickly scan it. What is an abstract? Why is it included with the article?

3. Look at the results or conclusions of the article. In your own words, what were the main findings of this research?
4. Find the methods or methodology section of your article. How was the study conducted? How were subjects found? What tools were used to gather data? Summarize what was done.
5. Are there any graphics included in the article? What kind? Why are they included?
6. Identify citations within your article text. Does your article use:
 - a. Numbered endnotes
 - b. In-text citations
 - c. Numbered footnotes
7. Find one in-text citation in the article, then turn to the bibliography/notes at the end of the article to find the corresponding citation entry. What kind of information do you find in the full citation? What is the purpose of this information/citation?
8. Who do you think the audience for this article is?

After you have completed questions 1-8, read the [comparison article](#).

9. What kind of information can you find about the author of the article?
10. Follow some of the links in the article, where do they lead you?
11. Who is the audience for this article?
12. Look at the comparison article and find at least three major differences between your scholarly article and your comparison article:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
13. In what situations would you use this article? In what situations would you use the scholarly article?
14. How did you read the scholarly article differently from the news article?
15. So, why do scholarly articles exist? Who should use them and for what purposes?



Journal Entry 6: Citing Your Sources



Intro:

Drawing on the words and ideas of other people is a key aspect of research, but you always need to let your reader know when you are using the words or thoughts of someone else. Our citation style tutorials will walk you through the fundamentals of citing.

Action:

1. Complete the tutorial for the citation style that you are required to use for this course:
 - [APA](#)
 - [MLA](#)
 - [Chicago](#)
2. Then, pick two of your sources - preferably two different types, such as a journal article and a website. Once you have selected your sources:
 - Search for them in a library database (LibSearch, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, etc) and use the database “cite” tool to generate a citation in the style you are using (APA, MLA, etc). [Here are some examples of what that tool looks like in different databases.](#)
 - Copy and paste the citation exactly as it is given to you below.
 - Then, using one of the many [citation resources](#) available to you, “fix” the citation, if necessary. (Hint: Figure out what type of source you are using and look for an example that matches that type).
 - Also include what the parenthetical in-text citation would look like.

Our Example

Citation style: [APA](#)

Citation generator used (database “cite” function, EasyBib, etc.): [Academic Search Premier - Cite feature](#)

Source type (journal article, book, chapter, etc.): [Scholarly Journal Article](#)

Generated citation: [Lieberman, M., & Riser-Kositsky, M. \(2023\). How School Libraries Buy Books, Struggle for Funds, and Confront Book Bans: An Explainer. Education week, 42\(28\), 4–5.](#)

Corrected citation: [Lieberman, M., & Riser-Kositsky, M. \(2023\). How school libraries buy books, struggle for funds, and confront book bans: An explainer. Education Week, 42\(28\), 4–5.](#)

In-Text (parenthetical) citation: [\(Lieberman & Riser-Kositsky, 2023\)](#)

Your Source 1

Citation generator used (database “cite” function, EasyBib, etc.):

Source type (journal article, book, chapter, etc.):

Generated citation:

Corrected citation (if needed):

In-Text (parenthetical):

Your Source 2

Citation generator used (database “cite” function, EasyBib, etc.):

Source type (journal article, book, chapter, etc.):

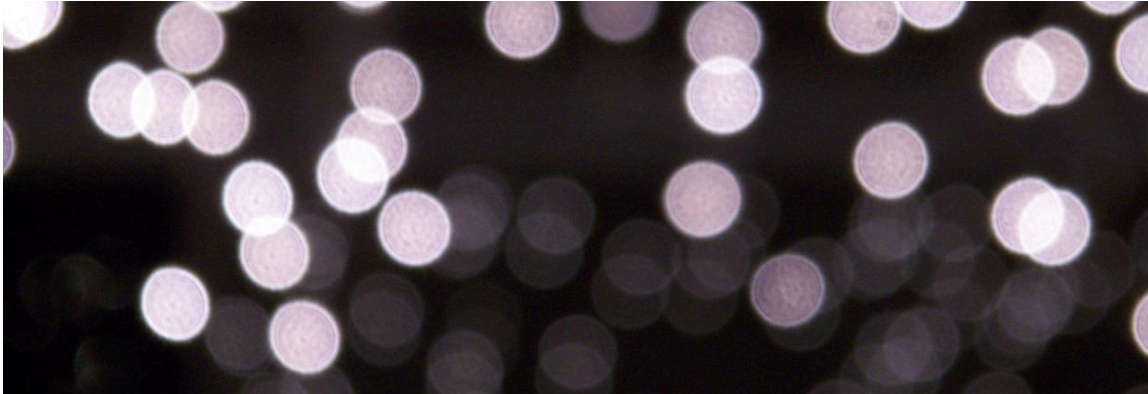
Generated citation:

Corrected citation (if needed):

In-Text (parenthetical):



Journal Entry 7: Reflecting on the Research Process



Intro:

Congratulations on reaching the end of your Research Journal! Chances are, your research topic has changed as you have worked your way through this journal. That is all part of the process of research - as you learn more about your topic, allow it to evolve and change into a more refined research project!

Action:

In this final journal entry, it's time to reflect on your research process by answering the questions below:

1. How has your research question evolved since you started this research journal?
2. How did you adapt your search when looking for information on your topic?
3. What barriers did you encounter during the research process? What did you do to try and overcome those?
4. What new search strategies did you learn?
5. What is the biggest piece of advice you would give another student about doing research?