English 102, **Task 3.1** Researching your topic and locating sources
Worksheet

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Step 1. State your research topic, question, and main focus

Enter your research topic and question below. Make sure to return to Task 2.3 and review the feedback you received from your instructor (and possibly your peers) on the possible research topics you came up with in the previous module. You will need to decide which research topic to choose and what you want to learn about it (your research question). Create a brief, 2-3 sentence summary of what your research project is about, including your topic and research question.

Your research focus (the issue you are researching) and research question (what are you trying to find out about this issue):

What does it really mean to have sovereignty in a world controlled by public systems and government power, and how can individuals claim private authority over their own lives?

Step 2. Choose your discipline or subject

Consider which discipline will make the most sense to use as a lens for your research question. For example, if you are researching the influence of social media use on young people's mental health, you can search for psychology journal articles if you want to find out what research studies say about this type of influence, but you can also search through a database of business journals if you want to find more about the factors that drive social media companies' decisions. By contrast, if you want to find out how social media influences the results of local and national elections, you can look both into research on social psychology and into political science publications.

Discipline(s) or subject(s) that best suit your research topic and question:

The best disciplines for my topic are political science**,** law, and philosophy. Political science fits because it studies power, government, and the public system. Law fits because my research connects to legal sovereignty and individual rights. Philosophy fits because this question also deals with deeper meanings of freedom and what it means to govern yourself.

Step 3. Come up with keywords

Now let's think through which search terms or keywords you'll need to use. First, make sure to read the guidelines on p.588 of *Successful College Writing* and other resources included in the reading assignments for this task, including these research tips from our library. Then, consider what you will be searching for: which key words will you use to search for sources on your topic? Write down at least 4 key words and come up with at least 3 synonyms for each of them.

E.g., if you are researching social media's influence on young people's mental health, you might use the following search terms: "social media AND mental health AND young people." To get more results, you can replace each of the main terms with a synonym, e.g., use a specific social media platform (e.g., Instagram), or use "teenagers" or "college students" instead of "young people."

Keyword:	Synonym #1	Synonym #2	Synonym #3
Sovereignty	Autonomy	Self governance	Self rule
Citizenship	Nationality	Legal identity	Civic status
Freedom	Independence	Liberty	Self determination
Public vs private	State vs individual	Legal fiction vs living soul	Authority vs Personhood

Step 4. Search with the general library database

Steps 4-7 will ask you to use the key words you generated in Step 3 and use different search engines to locate sources.

For Step 4, we'll start with the general library search, but instead of using the simple search bar on the library's front page, try using their advanced search and set the parameters of your search from the start, such as what type of sources you are looking for and the range for date of publication. Use multiple lines to enter your key terms. Try out different combinations from your list of synonyms for each term. Look through the results you are getting and find **at least two sources** that might be a good fit for your topic. List them below, including their URL, or permalinks (see this video for finding permalinks in our library website; or this video for permalinks within EBSCO databases). Make sure to save the PDFs of these sources on your computer whenever possible! It will make your research life a lot easier if you have your sources at hand instead of having to look them up again.

Source #1 (Library):
Title: Consequences of Supreme Court Decisions Upholding Individual Rights
URL/permalink: https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy3.library.arizona.edu/stable/pdf/1288628
Author(s): Jesse H. Choper
Date of publication: 1984
Type of source (e.g., article, book chapter, etc.): Scholarly journal article
Name of the journal this source is published in, or name of the publisher of the source is a book: he Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science

Discipline or field of research this source belongs to: Law and Political Science
How this sources fits in with your research topic: This article talks about how Supreme Court rulings shape what individual rights look like in practice. It connects to my topic because it shows how public authority defines and limits private freedom, which ties to the whole public vs private debate

Source #2 (Library):

Title: Treaty-Based Rights and Remedies of Individuals
URL/permalink: https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy3.library.arizona.edu/stable/pdf/1288628
Author(s): Carlos M. Vazquez
Date of publication: 1992
Type of source (e.g., article, book chapter, etc.): Scholarly journal article
Name of the journal this source is published in, or name of the publisher of the source is a book: Columbia Law Review
Discipline or field of research this source belongs to: Constitutional and International Law
How this sources fits in with your research topic: This article explains how international law affects personal rights under U.S. law. It helps me show how legal identity and national power overlap, and how individuals sometimes fall between public and private protection.

Note: as you skim through your sources, note what keywords are listed on the front page or on the library page for each source - sometimes that way, you find great new keywords to use.

Step 5: Search with Google Scholar

Now let's try the same keywords using a different database. Go to https://scholar.google.com/ and enter your keywords. You can limit the date of publication you are looking for, but you won't have the same search options as through the library database. You might also not have access to some of the sources Google Scholar will pull up for you; if that is the case, try to search for that source using our library search function.

Locate at least one source that is a good fit for your topic and list it below. Save the source as a PDF on your computer if possible.

Source #3 (Google Scholar):
Title: Patriotism and Nationalism, Left and Right: A Q-Methodology Study of American National Identity
URL/permalink:
https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C33&q=Patriotism+and+Nationalism%2C+Left+and+Right%3A+A+Q-Methodology+Study+of+American+National+Identity&btnG=
Author(s): Julian Bernath and Laura Heerman
Date of publication: 2020
Type of source (e.g., article, book chapter, etc.): Peer-reviewed journal article
Name of the journal this source is published in, or name of the publisher of the source is a book:
Discipline or field of research this source belongs to: Political Research Quarterly

How this sources fits in with your research topic: This study explores how people define American identity and how that connects to politics. It relates to my topic because it shows how identity is shaped by both public labels and private belief systems.

Step 6: Search a subject-specific database

Based on the disciplines or subjects you chose for your research project in Step 2, search for that discipline's specific database through the library list of databases and find at least one that fits your research project. Open the database and use the keywords you created to search for relevant publications. List at least one possible source below:

Source #4 (Discipline Database):
Title: Sovereignty
URL/permalink: https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Sovereignty
Author(s): Rebekka A. Klein
Date of publication: 2023
Type of source (e.g., article, book chapter, etc.): Theological reference entry
Name of the journal this source is published in, or name of the publisher of the source is a book: St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology
Discipline or field of research this source belongs to: Religion and Philosophy
How this sources fits in with your research topic: This source ties my legal research to spiritual sovereignty, showing how the idea of power came from divine rule before becoming political. It gives my project a bridge between law and faith.

Step 7: Search for a popular source

Now let's see what kinds of sources you can find by doing a simple internet search. You are welcome to use whichever search engine you prefer (Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, etc.). Use the same keywords or create new phrases based on the results you get. Locate at least one credible online source on your research topic and list it below. See this resource for reminders on how to evaluate online sources!

Source #5 (Popular Source):
Title: The Sovereign Citizen Movement and Potential Impacts on Lending Institutions
URL/permalink: https://www.poynerspruill.com/thought-leadership/the-sovereign-citizen-movement-and-potential-impacts-on-lending-institutions/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
Author(s), if available, or company/website that published the source: Kelly Newcomb
Date of publication, if available: June 9, 2025
Type of source (e.g., newspaper article, blog, etc.): Online article for general audience
How credible the source is and why: It's written by a legal-industry commentary site, well-accessible and aimed at non-academics. It analyzes how the sovereign citizen movement challenges conventional public authority and shifts responsibility to private identity.

How this sources fits in with your research topic: This article directly addresses how individuals claim private sovereignty and reject public/state power. It ties into my research question about public vs private sovereignty by showing a concrete example of people trying to govern themselves rather than submit to government systems

Step 8 (Optional): Search with AI

There are many AI tools that can help you look for peer-reviewed academic publications. (For a more comprehensive overview of AI tools for writing, see this guide from our library.)
We recommend that you try out one of these tools: Perplexity AI, Elicit, or Research Rabbit.
Please note you cannot use these AI research tools the same way you use traditional search engines: instead of typing up keywords, you can use complete sentences and define specific types of sources or topic details you are interested in. For example, if you are using Perplexity, you can use a prompt like this one: "What have been the most recent research findings on the effects of social media use on young people's mental health? Limit your review to the last 5 years and peer reviewed academic articles." (Click here to view the results of this search across two AI tools.) The response you'll get will include summaries of multiple studies with citations and links for where to find them. You will need to locate those sources and look through them yourself; keep in mind that you are not using AI as one of your sources but rather using it as a type of search engine to help you find sources. Below are some additional how-to guides for each of these AI tools if you'd like to learn more.
Research Rabbit is a slightly different tool in that its main function is to find connections between different publications on a given topic. If you decide to try it, you might use one of the sources you found in Steps 4-6 as your starting point.

For further help with AI tools:
- Perplexity AI: written directions and video guide (13 min)
- Elicit: written directions and video guide (3 min)
- Research Rabbit: written directions and video guide (12 min)

Source #6 (AI suggestion):
Title: The Sovereign Citizen Movement
URL/permalink:https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1257&context=eilr
Author(s): Ford Haymore
Date of publication: March 22, 2021
Type of source (e.g., article, book chapter, etc.): Law review article
Name of the journal this source is published in, or name of the publisher of the source is a book: Emory International Law Review
Discipline or field of research this source belongs to: Law, Political Science
AI tool you used to find this source: Perplexity AI search
How this sources fits in with your research topic: this article talks about how people in the movement see private vs public citizenship and where those ideas come from in history and law it explains their beliefs clearly without really taking sides so it works good for research that just wants to understand what they believe and why

Step 9: Reflect on your search experience

For the last step, create a short 1-page reflection focusing on the following questions (try to answer all of them, but you do not need to spend equal amount of time on each of them):
- Did you run into any challenges with any of the steps? What were they, and how did you work through them?
- Which search engine was the easiest to use, and which one was the most difficult, and why?
- Look through the sources you've collected so far. Which ones stand out as most relevant, important, or helpful, and why? What other sources might you need to find? E.g., do you need to find more information on the origins, scope, or causes of your chosen issue? Or more sources on possible solutions?
- What have you learned about your research topic so far? Was there any new information you found? How has your understanding of your topic changed? Do you think you need to adjust your research question in any way, and why?

Your reflection:

Reading through all these sources helped me understand sovereignty and the balance between public and private life on a deeper level each article showed a different side whether it was legal history political meaning or faith and power together they helped me see how freedom is shaped by both law and belief and how personal rights connect back to bigger systems of control and identity, also the propaganda that still surrounds this topic despite the case law that supports it.