This worksheet is designed to help you approach your research in a deliberate, effective way.

**STARTING YOUR RESEARCH: A 5-POINT LIST**

1. **Define the parameters of your research.** This is the first step to establishing a good research question, which is key to developing a strong thesis. Generally, research parameters are outlined in your prompt. As you read the prompt for your paper, consider the following questions:
   - **Who is the audience for this paper?** This will help you to find the right level for your research and determine the amount of background information you can assume your audience already knows. Knowing your audience will also help you understand how much of a case you need to make for the significance of your paper.
   - **What is the length? How many sources (primary & secondary) will you need to include?** These questions will help you determine the scope of your paper – how much space you’ll have to convince readers of your thesis.

2. **Establish a Good Research Question.** The best research questions meet five criteria. They are
   - **Audience-aware.** They delve into something their audience cares about or can be made to care about.
   - **Ambitious.** They pose questions that readers wouldn’t be able to answer without further research.
   - **Arguable.** They’re not statements of fact.
   - **Answerable.** They’re not philosophical inquiries.
   - **Appropriate in scope.** They can be convincingly answered within the assigned length.

3. **Set a timeline.** A last-minute research paper often reads like a last-minute research paper. Give yourself time to research, then write, then research again. You may want to lay out mini-deadlines based on the research tasks outlined below.

4. **Get help.** Academic databases are insider documents. They may seem intuitive, and because we’re used to the Internet you may blame yourself if you’re having trouble finding sources. But believe us, it’s not you. It’s them. Southwestern librarians are amazing resources. They not only know how to best find information, they may be able to suggest avenues for research you wouldn’t have considered. Set an appointment with a research librarian when you make your timeline.

5. **Remember that research and writing are intertwined.** We may think that we begin writing a paper when we sit down at our desks to start drafting. But a good research paper begins well before that moment. In fact, what you’re doing right now – reading this worksheet – is actually a part of the writing process. Academic writing and research are inextricable. It’s a common mistake to think of these as two separate processes, but often the process of writing illuminates further questions for research, and that research shows us ways to revise what we’ve already written. We’re taught to think that papers begin with a thesis, but actually they begin much, much earlier: when you choose a subject.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Task</th>
<th>Key Question</th>
<th>Ask Yourself:</th>
<th>Source Type(s) to See:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHOOSE A SUBJECT</strong></td>
<td>Why is this interesting or significant?</td>
<td>What background knowledge does your audience have? What will they need to understand your subject? What are the key terms/texts/events/figures/theories? Who talks about these terms/texts/events/figures/theories?</td>
<td><strong>Background Sources:</strong> dictionaries, encyclopedias, general-audience books &amp; articles</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CHOOSE AN APPROACH</strong></td>
<td>What kind of argument do you want to make?</td>
<td>Do you want to compare/contrast? Do you want to argue cause &amp; effect? Do you want to say something fits into a theory or category? Do you want to make a proposal for a certain kind of action? Do you want to make a judgment about the quality or morality of something? Do you want to rebut, refute, or refine another argument?</td>
<td><strong>Exhibit Sources:</strong> “primary texts”: books, films or documents, narratives, data that requires your interpretation  <strong>Argument Sources:</strong> “secondary texts”: academic books, journal articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FORMULATE A QUESTION</strong></td>
<td>What are some unanswered questions/unconsidered ideas/problems with other peoples’ arguments about your subject?</td>
<td>Is your question audience-aware? Is it ambitious? Is it arguable? Is it answerable? Is it appropriate in scope?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSE A HYPOTHESIS</strong></td>
<td>What do you think the answer to your question is?</td>
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<td><strong>CONSIDER COUNTER-ARGUMENTS</strong></td>
<td>What are some weaknesses you’ll need to address?</td>
<td>What have other authors said about your argument? What are some possible counterarguments that your audience might propose? How will you answer these?</td>
<td><strong>All types</strong></td>
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**YOU’RE READY FOR YOUR THESIS!**

**On Research Setbacks:** Every academic has had a “return to the drawing-board moment,” when they realize that their thesis has already been articulated somewhere else or they discover new information that proves their hypothesis (or even their thesis) incorrect. When this happens to you, it’s helpful to remember that this is not a failure; it’s a sign of good, thorough scholarship. Remember that both research and writing are skills. Even if the information that you discover during this process doesn’t pan out and you have to redo it, you’ve still learned something very valuable.

**Sources:**  