There are several steps which should be followed when conducting research.

**Step 1. Getting Started**

**Determine your goals**
A. Define your topic in the form of a question or statement.
B. Consider what limits to apply (i.e. a specific time period, specific age group, a specific aspect of the topic)
C. Determine the quantity of references you expect to retrieve.

**Identify General Concepts**
A. What general terms relate to your search?
B. Are you interested in the work of a specific author or various authors in the field?
C. Are there specific journals related to your topic?
D. Choose database(s)
   1. What is the database’s subject?
   2. Does the database carry the journals you need?
   3. Check the database descriptions, fact sheets, or ask a reference librarian to identify a suitable database.

**Step 2: Prepare your search**
A. Formulate your search
   1. Identify search terms. Are your terms too broad or too narrow?
   2. Try synonyms
   3. Use tools such as dictionaries, a thesaurus, taxonomic* lists, and controlled vocabulary** lists.
B. Build your search
   1. Combine terms with AND (public AND education)
   2. Broaden a search using OR (public OR private) AND education
   3. Check the database to see how results are displayed (i.e. by date, relevancy ranking, or other criteria).
   4. Do a quick initial search to get the focus of what you need.

**Step 3 Run the Search**
Step 4: Analyze your results
A. If the results are good, do you have all you need?
   1. Print out, save to disk or email results.
   2. Don’t forget to print the relevant citation information.
      (Most PDF documents do not include the citation information).

B. If the results are not what you expected
   1. Check your spelling terms
   2. Check the precision of your terms.
      a. Did you use controlled vocabulary?
      b. Did you use a taxonomic list?
      c. Does your search contain misleading terms?
      d. Check the database you chose to determine whether the databases adequately cover your topic. If it doesn’t try a different database.
   3. Rerun your search

C. Did you get too many results?
   1. Limit your results by choosing a specific field (i.e. article title, author, and so on.)
   2. Your search may be too broad. Narrow the search terms.
   3. Increase the preciseness of the search by using “AND” instead of “OR” (i.e. the search string “public AND private AND education” will retrieve only those documents which contain all three words.
   4. Re-run the search

D. Did you get too few results?
   1. Check the spelling of your search terms.
   2. Make your terms more general.
   3. Broaden your search strategy. Instead try: (Public or private) AND education.” This search will retrieve all documents with public education as well as all those with private education.
   4. Rerun the search using the broader terms
   5. Search additional databases.

Step 5: Build on your successful searches—Examine the citations for other relevant documents and ways to search.
1. You can find additional search terms by looking at the subject terms listed in the article.
2. Do an author search to find other articles by the author or co-authors.
3. Examine the article bibliography for related articles.

*Taxonomic list—classification of a particular science or subject in relation to its general laws or principles

**Controlled vocabulary—a list of words or terms which can be used as subject headings or descriptors.