Tips for Avoiding Research Anxiety

You've just been assigned a research paper/project/presentation. You aren’t sure where to start and you are feeling a bit queasy. You aren’t alone. Many students feel exactly the same way. Take a look through the tips below, take a deep breath and you are on your way! (Some of these tips come from in-depth interviews with students who successfully completed research projects.)

Don’t delay

Too many students do poorly on their papers and projects because they use a different model: they wait till the last minute, then hurriedly find a number of resources, read them and try to write the paper, without any clear focus. If you delay, you won’t have time to:

- Find the most appropriate materials
- Borrow materials we don’t own from other libraries via Interlibrary Loan
- Recall books that have been checked out
- Find additional materials to fill any gaps
- Read and reflect on the topic
- Choose (or change) the focus

Ask for help

Do think about asking a reference librarian for assistance. We’d be happy to give you a hand. In the University Library, the reference desk is to your left when you enter the building. Brief questions can even be asked electronically. Use the Ask Us! to tab on the Libraries’ Web site, http://library.albany.edu

Don’t worry!

Don’t be alarmed if you feel apprehensive or uncertain when you receive a research assignment. Many students do. The anxiety will ease up after you have selected a topic. A study proves it!

Pick a topic

When you are selecting a topic, try to identify controversial or cutting-edge issues in the subject you will be examining. Choosing such a topic will allow you to contribute to the "conversation" in the field, rather than just rehashing what others think.
Talk...

To your professors and/or TAs during office hours, and discuss what interests you. They will be happy to help you find a topic that you're interested in but is also pertinent to the assignment.

Browse

Use the Libraries' online catalog to find an encyclopedia or other reference book on your subject. Search for reference books by selecting "Reference" in the "Library/Collection/Format" drop-down menu on Minerva. Then perform a broad keyword search for your topic.

Trace citations

Look at the list of citations in the articles and books you are reading to find related materials on your topic. Also try the online catalog, article databases (available through the Databases link on the Libraries' Web site), and the Internet.

Use Personalized Assistance with Searching (PAWS)

If you're having trouble finding resources, PAWS is your next step. PAWS is an hour-long, one-on-one session with a librarian to help you get the most out of your research. These in-depth consultations can help you choose the right databases, formulate an effective search strategy, access new information and be kept up to date on the latest articles in your field. To make a PAWS appointment, complete the PAWS form.

Evaluate

Look at the material you are finding. Not all sources are created equal! Be particularly vigilant when evaluating materials found on the Internet.

Rethink, Revise

The research process works in a loop: some searching for materials, reading what you have and clarifying your focus, identifying additional sources that you need, finding and reading them. You may even need to find more sources once you have started to write, to make connections or fill holes. Selecting a focus within your topic is crucial.
Take notes

Use note cards or some other method that works for you to keep track of direct quotes from your source material. Be sure to cite these quotes in the footnotes or endnotes for your paper. Make sure you have all the pertinent information for these cites!

Submit a draft

Ask your professor for early feedback on your written work. Some professors require that you hand in a draft for comments. If your professor hasn't, ask if you might do so anyway. Both the earlier deadline and the chance to revise your work will help you.

http://library.albany.edu/infolit/tips