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## Finding Information on Controversial Topics

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You won't have any trouble finding information on most controversial topics, but it can be difficult to find quality information. First, determine what you are looking for. Opinions on both sides of a topic? A balanced overview? Some background facts and statistics? You will need all of these for a research paper.

### GETTING STARTED: IDEAS FOR TOPICS

If you haven't chosen a topic yet, there are many places to get ideas. For example, try the reference book [10,000 ideas for term papers, projects, and reports](#) by Kathryn Lamm. Your librarian may suggest a similar book. Current magazines and newspaper articles, especially the opinion or editorial columns, are also good sources for ideas. Or try browsing through the [library catalog](#) for books in series on controversial topics, or through one of the overview sources listed below. Remember that your topic may have to fit specific guidelines set by your instructor, and that you may have to broaden, narrow, or change the focus of your topic as you find more information.

### FINDING OVERVIEWS

- CQ Researcher**  
 Available both online and in the library, CQ Researcher contains in-depth articles, about 30 pages each, on current topics. Each article has one page labeled "At Issue" giving expert opinions on both sides of a controversial question within the topic. A history of the topic, statistics, and sources for further information are also given. *Note: you must be a current student, staff, or or faculty member of STLCC to access CQ Researcher online.*
- Issues and Controversies @ Facts.com**  
 Similar to CQ Researcher, but the articles are shorter and focused on more specific topics. This is available in both print and online versions. The online version also includes a list of suggested Research Topics and a section called Issues: Pro and Con which details arguments on various sides of controversial issues and links to related news stories.
- Editorials on File**  
 This is a collection of editorial columns from newspapers around the country, arranged by topic. This is a good place to look for opinions about particular issues and events in the news.
- Encyclopedia of Social Issues or Social Issues in America: an Encyclopedia**  
 Find history, definitions, and brief overviews of many controversial topics in this encyclopedia.
- Ethics encyclopedias**  
 What makes a topic controversial? Often it includes an ethical or moral question. These encyclopedias include overviews and discussions of complex ethical questions relating to many controversial topics.
- Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center**  
 This database contains essays, articles written from differing points of view, and topic overviews. It also includes a Research Guide with tips for analyzing opinion articles and a Toolbox for help with the process of writing a report including choosing a topic, making an outline, building an argument, and writing a conclusion.

### Other specialized encyclopedias

Specialized encyclopedias covering a specific field or subject area tend to be much more in-depth than general encyclopedias. Ask a reference librarian for suggestions.

### Book series on controversial topics

Each book in the following series titles covers a single broad subject. You might want to use just a single chapter from one of these books. Different sides of the issues are presented and, in some cases, statistics and historical background are included. To find a list of these books, type the series title in the [STLCC Library Catalog](#).

- Contemporary World Issues
- Current Controversies
- Opposing Viewpoints
- Taking Sides

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### FINDING BOOKS (& VIDEOS, TOO!)

The STLCC Library Catalog, available from the Library Services web page, lists all books, videos, sound recordings and periodical titles owned by the St. Louis Community College Libraries at Florissant Valley (FV), Forest Park (FP), Meramec (M), and Wildwood (W)

The Library Catalog isn't difficult to use, but it can be complex. To get the best results, you may want to ask the

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advice of a librarian. Meanwhile, here are a few tips for finding the best resources for your topic in the Library Catalog.

### Start with a Subject search.

Use Subject when your topic is broad and/or can be described in a word or two. The STLCC Library Catalog uses standard Library of Congress subject headings, and most broad headings are broken down into smaller subdivisions. For example, search for Death Penalty. You will be referred to the subject heading Capital Punishment. Under Capital Punishment, you can find a list of related subjects and a breakdown of subdivisions for specific countries, states, and aspects of capital punishment such as moral and ethical aspects, political aspects, history, or case studies.

### Use Keyword to find more books...

Keyword searching is useful if your topic is hard to find or doesn't fit under any of the standard subject headings. Sometimes a keyword search will help you find the right subject heading. You can combine keywords to narrow or broaden your topic. See the [Search Tips](#) for details and examples.

### ...but use Keyword with caution!

When you type just one word, you will get a listing of all items that include your search word anywhere in the description, such as the subject headings, title, author's name, or even the publisher. For example, if you type just the word Chicago, your list will include books published in Chicago, making it difficult to find just those about the city.

### Limit by campus.

If you get a long list of books on your subject, use the drop-down box to limit your search to just your campus. But keep in mind that you can request books to be sent from other campuses, or even other college & university libraries if the resources aren't available at your campus. Ask a librarian for details.

### Scan the chapter headings

For some books, the complete table of contents is available in the description of the book. You might find a chapter that focuses on your topic.

For more help using the STLCC Catalog, visit [Searchpath, Module 3](#).

## FINDING MAGAZINE, JOURNAL, AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Magazine, journal, and newspaper titles are listed in the Library Catalog, but to find articles within them, you will need to use a periodical index. A periodical index will list articles from selected publications by subject. Many indexes are online and include databases of the full text of the articles. These can be searched through the Internet, but only by subscribers. STLCC libraries subscribe to a wide range of periodical databases. You must be a current student, staff, or faculty member of STLCC to use these databases. You may link to a list of [databases for controversial topics](#) or a [complete listing of the library databases](#). Here are just a few of the most useful databases for controversial issues.

- EBSCOhost and Thomson Gale are both collections of databases, some general ([EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite](#) and [Thomson Gale Academic OneFile](#)) and some specialized for health care and business topics. These are the best resources to start with for general magazine and journal articles on a wide variety of subjects. In EBSCOhost, you can search several databases at once.
- [LexisNexis](#) contains full-text news, business, legal, and reference information sources. Newspapers included in the service are updated several times daily. For best results, use the Guided News Search (not the Quick News Search). To find editorials and opinion columns, add "and editorial" or "and commentary" to your key words. For example "biotechnology and editorial" will find editorial opinion columns about biotechnology.
- [Ethnic NewsWatch](#) contains full text articles from journals, newspapers and magazines of the ethnic, minority, and native press. It's not only a good resource for ethnic and racial issues, but also to find perspectives and viewpoints of different groups on a wide spectrum of topics.
- [Contemporary Women's Issues](#) provides full text access to magazine and journal articles on gender issues.

For more help using the databases, visit [Searchpath, Module 4](#).

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## FINDING RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Here are a few web sites with information on controversial topics:

- [Hot Paper Topics](#)  
Web links on common student research topics organized by a librarian.
- [ProCon.org](#)  
ProCon.org is a non-profit education web site that pulls together excerpts of arguments on both sides of controversial issues. Overviews of issues, key questions, and links or references to the sources are included. Sources are rated for credibility.
- [The Annenberg Public Policy Center \(AAPC\)](#)  
"AAPC conducts ongoing research in the areas of political discourse, children and media, the Internet, and health communications." Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.
- [Brookings Institution: Research Topics](#) Brookings Institution is an independent nonprofit research organization.
- [Frontline](#)  
Frontline is a PBS television series that explores issues in public affairs. Each program since the 1995-96 season has a companion web site including a transcript, in-depth reports, and viewer comments.
- [The Gallup Organization](#)

This web site includes the results of opinion polls conducted in the United States. Much of the information is free, but there is also a premium subscription area.

- **[Public Agenda Online](#)**

Through public opinion polls and in-depth reports, Public Agenda seeks to inform legislators about public points of view and to educate citizens about policy issues. Overviews of critical issues and arguments for different sides of the issue are included as well as opinion polling results and statistics.

- **[Documents in the News](#)**

This site is produced and maintained by the University of Michigan Documents Center. The site identifies issues making headlines and provides web sources with additional information.

- **[Fedstats](#)**

Links to statistics from over 100 U.S. federal agencies.

- **[USA.gov](#)**

"The U.S. government's official web portal" provides access to government information at all levels.

If your topic isn't covered here or if you need other sources, try [Recommended Websites](#). These web sites have been selected by STLCC librarians for their quality as sources of information. For additional information about web research, see [Searchpath, Module 5](#).

Don't forget to [evaluate your sources!](#)

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