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Last fall, I was in an international relations class. For our final project, we had to write a paper discussing a real life application of an issue that we studied in the course material. The professor, Dr. Virginia Haufler, handed out a list of suggested topics, with different points to consider in our answers. During the course, I was always very interested in the changing notions of sovereignty in our increasingly globalized world. As I was studying, I noticed that world politics had undergone a complete shift in recent years, and relations between states had very much changed, especially due to new communications technologies. As I was thinking about my topic, I was reading current newspaper articles for a situation where the sovereignty issue was especially applicable. Almost every day, I found an article about human rights. I started thinking about how different countries interpret the nature of rights in different ways. From here, I began my academic search.

For my first round of research, I used Research Port and found some databases related to politics. In these databases, I used search terms related to my topic. I kept a record of all the search terms I used, and noted which ones generated the best results. As I found interesting and related sources, I also found different keywords and subject terms. Additionally, I looked at the bibliographies of the journal articles, to see the sources that my sources used. Most of the time journal articles referenced books. These books were often the backbone literature of the field. The catalogue of the University of Maryland library system became very important, as almost any book I wished to consult was in the system. If I could not locate the book, I used the interlibrary loan service to request it from some other location. In certain cases, I found books on Google books, a database with almost every book every published. It was hard work sifting

through all the articles and books for relevant information, but abstracts and indexes proved very useful in isolating ideas relevant to what I wanted.

However, after taking notes on all my sources, I was still overwhelmed. I began to look for patterns across all the research, but there just seemed to be so much. I scheduled an appointment with my Teacher's Assistant, David Prena. We spoke about what I was trying to prove, and he helped me narrow my focus to one particular issue: the death penalty, what I was really interested in. By limiting the number of sources that I originally found to a more workable number, it allowed for a greater depth of analysis and sophistication. Because there was less information to sift through, I became very familiar with the literature of the field and was able to judge the quality of works.

In my final draft, I used a combination of primary sources, such as news articles and international laws, and secondary academic works. After drafting an outline, I looked over my research notes and formulated the argument I wanted to make. There were texts which did not support my argument, but I tried to incorporate them into my work by refuting their arguments. I quickly learned the main opinions in the field and whenever I found something which seemed very different, I conducted more research on the particular argument as well as the author, and looked at the sources the author based his argument on. If everything proved valid, I felt free to use it in my paper.

The most important aspect of my project was narrowing my question. This level of focus allowed me to pay careful attention to details. There are billions of sources out there, and unless one is asking something specific, there can be no specific conclusions. Research needs to be conducted with this in mind. Additionally, sources themselves will often narrow a broadly construed topic. A researcher has to look at what the sources say, and not what he wants to say.

Properly reading and listening can not only save time, but create a work which is innovative as well as true to historiography of the topic.