OK, SORRY FOR THE LECTURE. BACK TO THE... UH... LECTURE. SO, LET'S SAY YOU HAVE YOUR TOPIC, AND YOU'RE READY TO START RESEARCHING—

WHOA, HOLD UP, YEAR, THAT'S A TOPIC... A BIG TOPIC. A TOPIC THAT'S BEEN DISCUSSED BY THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, WEBSITES, OLD MEN ON PORCHES...

ARE YOU REALLY UP TO SUMMARIZING ALL OF THAT IN TEN PAGES?

The AMERICAN CIVIL WAR!

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO. TAKE THAT TOPIC AND NARROW IT DOWN. CHOOSE ONE ASPECT OF YOUR TOPIC AND ASK A QUESTION ABOUT IT.

HMM... OK, WHO HAD BETTER WEAPONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR?

THAT'S A GOOD START!

STILL, THE QUESTION'S VERY BROAD, AND IT'S VAGUE. FIRST OF ALL, WHO IS "WHO"? AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY "BETTER"? BIGGER, FASTER, MORE... ALL OF THE ABOVE?

YOU'LL NEED TO CLARIFY YOUR QUESTION BY DIGGING A LITTLE DEEPER. COMING UP WITH A MANAGEABLE QUESTION CAN BE TOUGH WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE TOPIC WELL. IF THAT'S THE CASE, SPEAK WITH YOUR INSTRUCTOR, A LIBRARIAN, OR START WITH SOME GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE TOPIC.

(WE'LL TALK ABOUT HOW TO FIND THAT SOON.)

GO DO THAT. I'LL WAIT HERE.
Now that you've had time to chip away at that question, what do you have for me?

Excellent! Still a bit broad, but getting there. Try narrowing it down some more. You can even shift the focus of the topic if you think it might lead you in a useful direction.

That's a great question! Now, since this is a research paper, turn that question into a statement.

Great! That's what we call your "thesis statement." You've taken a stand on the topic, and now it's your job to gather evidence to see if you're correct.

Sometimes you'll find evidence that proves your thesis wrong. Don't ignore that evidence! You can adjust and refine your thesis as you collect and analyze a variety of sources. Be flexible and open to surprising findings while still looking at things with a critical eye. That shows you've grown as a researcher.

My research question is "How did the supply of weapons affect the outcome of the Civil War?"

Oh, how about "Did the Union's system for manufacturing and supplying weapons help defeat the Confederacy in the Civil War?"

"Effective weapon manufacturing and distribution helped the Union defeat the Confederacy?"

I'm still hearing a question.

"Effective weapon manufacturing and distribution helped the Union defeat the Confederacy."
For the exercises in this book, create an online blog, website, Twitter feed (or any other type of online social media) that you can use to track your understanding of information literacy and the research process. Feel free to answer the questions by using text, images, video, sound, or any other approach, **BUT** be sure to use outside information ethically. (I know we haven’t covered that yet, but for now, just be sure to let us know if you use information created by someone else and show us where you got it. When in doubt, LINK.) This can be formal or informal, but you should really focus on answering the questions honestly and thinking about your own understanding and experience finding and using information.

Remember to use the online tool you have chosen to record your responses to the questions.

1. Take a closer look at your research question. Is it too broad or too specific? Often students have problems narrowing their question. Try to think about the different components in your question, and ask yourself if they can be broken down any further.

2. You might also try using something called a concept map to break down your question:
Try this out with your own topic, and see if you can develop a good research question or even multiple questions.

3. How do you find background information for your topic? How do you get started? Be honest, is it *Wikipedia*? Explain why you use a specific resource for background information, and share your thoughts on why that resource is the most useful for you. Do you use the information as a starting point, or do you use it as the core of your research? Which way is the correct way? (Hint: Reread the chapter!)

4. Try to find an expert on your topic. See who is writing academic articles on the topic, or search for a professional organization devoted to that topic. How do experts use the open Web to communicate? How are they using blogs, wikis, and social media to interact with one another and the greater public? How is this information different than information you’d find in a book or a journal article?

5. Locate an academic resource on your topic, as well as a general online resource. For example, you might find a professional website on cancer treatment, as well as an online forum with public opinions on cancer treatment. How does the information in the two resources differ? How can you tell if one is “better” than the other? How do you know if you can trust the information in either resource?