HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RESEARCH

1. GET A LIBRARY CARD!

I.   With a library card, you have FREE access to a large number of databases that normally you would have to pay for. These include things like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* online and Ebscohost, which indexes periodical articles on a myriad of subjects. You can get access to these databases at home. You can print out full text articles from newspapers, magazines, newsletters, etc. All you need is your library card number and a PIN, which is usually the last four digits of your phone number.

II.   The library also offers you the services of a professional researcher, your research librarian, again for free. S/he can help you find all sorts of resources for your project. The librarian can show you specialized collections which relate to your subject. For instance, if you are doing a project about an animal, the librarian can direct you to the *Wildlife Encyclopedia* as well as to the proper section of the shelves for your animal.

III.   The library's website is www.santacruzpl.org. Once you are on this site, click on Internet Resources. From there click on List of all Databases and then scroll down the list to find a database that would help you with your subject. There are databases on history, science, art, government, business, and genealogy, among other things. Some of the databases require that you use your library card and PIN.

IV.   ALSO on the first page of the library website is a link to information for teens. Click on this link to go to homework help and this will, in turn, connect you to sources you can use.

V.   Last, but not least, your topic will have what is called a Dewey Decimal number attached to it. (Unless you go to a library which uses what is called the Library of Congress Cataloging System). This same number will be on books in the Young People's department, the adult section, the oversize section, the Young Adult section, DVDs and VHS videos. Once you have this call number, you can look under it in all of these sections of the library—and in any other library that uses the Dewey Decimal System.

2. USING THE INTERNET

I.How do you get the information you want without being completely overrun with a gazillion hits? Also, how can you tell what is good information and which is suspect?

II.To limit your search in Google, you can use minus signs and the words that you don't want searched. For instance, if you want to look up the animal jaguar but not the team or the car, in the search box you would enter "jaguar -team -car". Note that there is a space BEFORE the minus sign but not one after.

III.To limit your search in an online database like Ebscohost, you can use Boolean operators. These are the words and, not, and or. For the above search, you would enter the terms "jaguar not (team or car)".

IV.To find out if something on the internet is useful or accurate, first look at your ending term on the website. If it ends in gov. or org. or edu., then you can be fairly confident that this information is accurate. If it ends in com., then you need to compare it to other resources you have since com. means that it is a commercial site, not a governmental, organizational, or educational site.

REMEMBER:

Just because something is on a website doesn't mean it's true. Things that are in scientific journals, magazines, newspapers, and books are more likely to be true. Besides the fact that an editor checks things over before they are published, the content of the work can be judged by peer review—meaning that another person who has studied that subject can judge better its accuracy.

3. OTHER SOURCES FOR YOUR RESEACH

Besides newsletters and newspapers, magazines and books, and the internet, and things your friendly neighborhood librarian can lead you to, where else can you get information on your topic?

I.   Try the **phonebook**. There may be a local organization that studies your topic. You may be able to arrange an interview with someone, or perhaps the organization offers talks or presentations on your subject and you can attend.

II.   Another place to find organizations is to look at that list of **reference databases** that the library has on its website. Some of those databases list organizations, their addresses and phone numbers, fax numbers, websites, and a brief description of their purpose.

III.   Try a **teacher** who knows your subject, or call one of the local college or university departments.

IV.   Ask yourself, "Who do I know?" or "Who does my **parent (friend, relative) know?"** If you are doing something on space exploration or rockets, do you know anyone who works at NASA? If you are interested in archaeology, do you have a relative who is in the Santa Cruz Archaeological Society? There are lots of places to find information on your subject.

4. KEEPING YOUR INFORMATION TOGETHER

Once you've gathered your information, besides . . .

• putting things together in a binder or folder and

• writing your bibliographical information on your tracking sheet,

• it can be a good idea to xerox the title page and the back of the title page to each of your sources and attach that to the information you have gotten from that source. For instance, you read an article entitled

"The Big Cheese: a Rat's Dream" written by Maurice Mouser and Ima Ratt and published in the magazine *Swiss, a Holey Delight* on June 12, 2009. Copy or write this information down and attach that sheet to the notes you have made from this article, or the copy of the article you made. This helps you to organize your research. *It also gives you a back-up if you should lose your tracking sheets*