



SALLY M. WALKER'S TOP TEN RESEARCH TIPS

Award-winning author of *Fossil Fish Found Alive*, *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine*, and *Written in Bone*

I love to learn. I like to ask questions. And I love to get answers. Doing the research for my books gives me the opportunity to do this. Each new topic—a strange fish, an early submarine, or colonial settlers' bones—gives me the chance to explore something new. And that's what doing research is: a great adventure.

Sadly, many people believe research is boring. They couldn't be more wrong! It's up to us to help them discover the truth: research is fun! Here are some of my favorite tips that will help you on your research journey.

- 1. BRAINSTORM.** Once you have the subject of your research project, brainstorm with friends, family, and classmates to create a list of possible sources where you might find information about that topic. Your list might include libraries, museums, universities, businesses, or other places, depending on the topic you are researching.
- 2. WRITE QUESTIONS.** Before you explore your list of sources, write down 5 to 10 questions that you would like to answer about your topic. These questions will act like a road map for your research. They will help you to focus on the topic.
- 3. CHOOSE A VARIETY OF SOURCES.** When you go to each information source, look for a wide variety of materials—books, diaries, newspapers, magazines, professional journals, and even nonfiction videos. If you are researching a plant or an animal, try to see one in a garden, zoo, or museum (even dinosaurs can be found in a museum). You might even have an opportunity to interview scientists, historians, or professionals who are experts on your topic. Make it a game, and see how many different types of materials you can find.
- 4. USE THE OFFICIAL TERMINOLOGY.** For example, if you are researching plants or animals, use the organism's scientific name—the Latin name scientists give all living organisms. These names consist of two parts: the genus and the species. Using the scientific name during an Internet search will weed out unrelated material, which saves time.
- 5. READ THE MATERIAL FIRST.** Don't try to take notes while you are reading. Instead, read several paragraphs or pages. Think about what you've read. Then only write down new and relevant information that is presented in the material you just finished reading. Again, this saves time since you won't bother to write down any facts that you know you've already collected elsewhere. On your note paper, make sure you include the name of the source where you found each fact.
- 6. MAKE BIBLIOGRAPHY CARDS.** Each time you read new research material, take the time to write down the bibliographic information for the source on an index card. Keep the cards together with a rubber band. When you are ready to write the bibliography, you won't have to go hunting for your sources. They'll be right there at your fingertips. This is another research time-saver.
- 7. LOOK AT PICTURES AND READ CAPTIONS.** Authors often include information in captions. And careful examination of photos usually provides additional information as well.
- 8. DOUBLE CHECK FACTS.** If you use the Internet, make sure you double check the facts. There is A LOT of incorrect information on the Internet. Use sources such as newspapers and books to double check information collected on the Internet.
- 9. DON'T COPY.** When you are writing your report, do not copy the words exactly from your resource material. Present the information in your own words. If you find a sentence or two that stands out and might make a powerful quotation in your research paper, be sure to clearly mark it as a quotation by putting those words inside quotation marks and listing the name of the source where you found the quoted material.
- 10. HAVE FUN!** Research is an adventure. Keep it fun by thinking of new ways to seek information and creative ways to present it. Look for facts that make you raise your eyebrows in surprise. If the information delights you, it will grab the reader's attention too.