How to Research a Topic with AI (Step by Step)

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A fully illustrated 28-step guide to researching a topic with AI: frame a sharp question, find and verify real sources, extract and synthesise evidence, then cite and fact-check without falling for fabricated references.

Phase 1 — Frame the Question and Plan

1. **Turn a broad topic into one question**
   Turn a broad topic into one question.
2. **Write the scope as three limits**
   Write the scope as three limits.
3. **List what a complete answer must cover**
   List what a complete answer must cover.
4. **Record your starting assumptions**
   Record your starting assumptions.
5. **Ask for a map, not an essay**
   Ask for a map, not an essay.
6. **Generate search terms and synonyms**
   Generate search terms and synonyms.
7. **Decide which sources count in advance**
   Decide which sources count in advance.

Phase 2 — Find and Verify Sources

8. **Search scholarly databases first**
   Search scholarly databases first.
9. **Ask AI to summarise only what you supply**
   Ask AI to summarise only what you supply.
10. **Verify every citation before you use it**
    Verify every citation before you use it.
11. **Read the primary source, not the summary**
    Read the primary source, not the summary.
12. **Flag every claim with no source**
    Flag every claim with no source.
13. **Cross-check one key fact in two places**
    Cross-check one key fact in two places.
14. **Remove confident but vague statements**
    Remove confident but vague statements.

Phase 3 — Extract and Synthesise

15. **Build a claim-and-evidence table**

    Build a claim-and-evidence table.

16. **Summarise each source in your own words**

    Summarise each source in your own words.

17. **Group evidence by theme, not by source**

    Group evidence by theme, not by source.

18. **Record contradictions explicitly**

    Record contradictions explicitly.

19. **Draft the argument before asking AI to write**

    Draft the argument before asking AI to write.

20. **Use AI to stress-test your reasoning**

    Use AI to stress-test your reasoning.

21. **Merge sources into one coherent narrative**

    Merge sources into one coherent narrative.

Phase 4 — Cite, Check and Publish

22. **Match each claim to a numbered citation**

    Match each claim to a numbered citation.

23. **Format citations to the required style**

    Format citations to the required style.

24. **Disclose how you used AI**

    Disclose how you used AI.

25. **Recheck the five most load-bearing facts**

    Recheck the five most load-bearing facts.

26. **Include a source that disagrees with you**

    Include a source that disagrees with you.

27. **Read the finished piece aloud once**

    Read the finished piece aloud once.

28. **Archive the sources for reuse**

    Archive the sources for reuse.

Sources

1. Anthropic — AI research and documentation
   https://www.anthropic.com/
2. Purdue OWL — writing and citation guide
   https://owl.purdue.edu/
3. NIST — AI Risk Management Framework
   https://www.nist.gov/
4. Oxford Reference
   https://www.oxfordreference.com/

Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-Research-with-AI. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/correcti