

Getting Started in Research

1. Clarify your interests. Do your homework. Do this in a few ways:

A. Investigate areas of interest – read books or magazines in field of interest and recent journals to understand the areas and methods of research efforts. Notice the ways in which the field is organized. For example, in psychology, major research can be categorized according to these general areas: clinical, cognitive, educational, developmental, social, organizational. Be sure to understand the major organizing features of your field in an attempt to understand your area of interest.

B. Visit the website of your department and research activity of faculty members. This can inform you about the general area (as mentioned above), but also give you a more specific sense of the type of research that is occurring here at Mississippi State University and who may be doing work of interest to you.

C. Be sure to visit past undergraduate research symposium booklets to review what other undergraduate students have accomplished, to see what interests you, and perhaps find potential mentors. <https://www.honors.msstate.edu/research/undergraduate-research-symposium/past-symposia/>

D. Don't worry if you are not sure – being open to options is good. Have a list of multiple, potential interesting projects or mentors. The experience may help you clarify what you like or not. Engaging in research is a learning experience for you in numerous areas: working with others; the content area; research process; new skills; how scholarly findings are established, etc.

E. If you want a bit more guidance on research, there are a two books that may be helpful to you:

1. Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., Williams, J.M., Bizup, W.T. & Fitzgerald, W.T. (2016). *The Craft of Research, 4th ed.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
2. Hudley, A.H.C, Dickter, C.L., & Franz, H.A. (2017) *The Indispensable Guide to Undergraduate Research: Success in and Beyond College.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Overall, preparation and some reading on your part will help you define your interests as you further understand a field and its offerings. Doing some reading and becoming informed allows you to engage in meaningful discussions with a potential mentor.

2. Clarify your goals and expectations for research

Be realistic and honest about your timing. Do note that it can be a major commitment on the part of a faculty member in terms of time, effort, and sometimes expenses to agree to mentor a student researcher. In addition, it takes time and attention and diligence for you to learn skills, understand the field, and contribute to activities. So, engaging in faculty guided research is a commitment from both parties. Faculty are understanding of your busy schedule, so be sure to be up front and honest about the time you have available and amount you can devote in a given term and for future terms.

Also, note some research experiences are voluntary – some are paid. If you are engaging in an unpaid research, consider a DIS (Directed Individual Study) or EXL in the department as a way to take a class that will allow you to devote regular time to research activities. Be sure to check with the faculty mentor about this and with your department degree advisor about how this may fit into your curriculum.

3. Update your resume

This should include information about yourself, your education, prior work experience, prior research if applicable, relevant coursework, skills, credentials, hobbies, etc. Don't oversell but don't undersell either. Be precise and accurate. Aim for one side of a single page.

4. Contact someone:

This can be done in multiple ways. There is no single method for this. Students find opportunities in various ways.

A. Talk to professor yourself – especially if you have good relationship with someone from class or advising.

B. Investigate opportunities posted at Mississippi State University at <https://www.urcd.msstate.edu>

C. Keep your eyes and ears open. You may hear or see something in your department or in the library or from a peer.

D. Meet with Dr. Anastasia Elder, Director of Undergraduate Research (C206 Griffis Hall; 325-2522) who can help you locate research opportunities or be paired with a mentor.

When you are ready for a meeting with a potential faculty mentor or are ready to send an email request, be prepared with the following material:

- Name, netid, major & minor, year (e.g., sophomore, etc.)
- Interests and goals for research
- Updated resume
- Time /schedule you can devote to research. Consider summer too!

5. Once you have started, aim to share your research activities and results.

Present at the annual Spring or Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium; discuss with your mentor about professional organizations in your field or presenting at conferences. These can include Honors specific ones or ones in the field. These are typically offered at state, regional, and national level.