

Topic Development

All good research begins with a solid topic. Initially, men’s suits were of no importance to me. I began with discussing subjects of interest with my Professor, Dr. Elizabeth Williams. While explaining my love of women’s nineteenth century fashions, Dr. Williams mentioned how modern men’s suits originated from the same period. When I later stumbled upon *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress, and Consumer Culture in Britain* by Brent Shannon, my entire perspective and direction changed. Reading Shannon’s book led me to become curious on how the industrial revolution, occurring just before all these changes in suits, affected this evolution in menswear. At this point, I had a spark for a topic, but fleshing it out took a lot more work.

I knew I wanted to study men’s suits in the 19th century, but it took a lot of help to decide the details I wanted to focus on. My first step was the return to Dr. William’s office, here she suggested I contact a librarian. At first I was hesitant, feeling confident in my research skills and thinking I did not need their assistance. However, a dozen failed search results soon brought me to emailing a subject librarian. I wish I would have asked for help sooner! Within the same day a librarian responded with multiple sources that helped me find a starting place for my research. The subject librarians are an incredible resource I will use more in the future. I used the footnotes of these works and Brent Shannon’s book to then help find the majority of the rest of my sources. It was a long path to finding a research topic, but the work was not only beneficial to the writing on my paper, but also in increasing my research skills.

Research Strategies

My initial research plan was to go through the footnotes of Brent Shannon’s book, search every source in Worldcat, and pull every book off of the shelf in Edmon Low that was remotely
similar to my topic. I found many valuable sources through this method, but I also became overwhelmed looking at the stacks of books filling up my dorm room. At this point in my research I learned a valuable skill—read book reviews. When I started reading source descriptions and reviews I began to be able to weed out inapplicable sources before I ordered or checked them out. Though the OSU library has many wonderful sources, I have thankfully learned to only borrow what is closely related to a topic.

**Information Resources**

The Edmon Low Library and its resources were crucial to my research. I used a research guide created for my class that suggested many different resources that would be particularly useful for our papers—including Hathitrust and Europeana. Every physical book that I used came directly from the OSU library or was ordered through the InterLibrary Loan Services. Most of the articles came from JSTOR and ProQuest. I found multiple primary source etiquette books on Hathitrust as well. Of all the resources used in this research, the Hathitrust database was the most useful. I struggled the most in finding primary resources, but this database’s easy search functions and large collections allowed me to find many documents to use in my paper. The least useful resource in my paper was Europeana. Initially, it seemed like a great place to find illustrations for my paper. However, I never could find pertinent images and ultimately used other sources. The resources available made a major impact on my research. The greatest limitation resources put on my research were language barriers. Though I know some French, I only felt comfortable working with resources written in English. Because of this, I had to limit my studies to just England instead of extending it to France as I had initially planned.

**Finding Information**
My first searches utilized the BOSS search box. I just kept searching key terms such as “Industrial Revolution,” “Suits,” and “19th century.” I furthered my search to using JSTOR and occasionally Worldcat. Eventually, I began to limit searches by the language, place of publication, date, and other classifications required of my sources. My greatest troubles came when I searched for primary sources. I wanted to see if I could find fashion magazines and journals, but they were elusive. Whenever I did find a location these articles were offered, they usually had to have an extra fee paid. Also, sometimes the websites that appeared in a general web search were not reputable sources. Another issue was that after searching various combinations of terms, I quickly lost track of what I had and had not searched. I quickly learned to keep a running list of what I had searched.

**Evaluating Information**

All my research resulted in a lot of information that needed to be transformed into a presentable argument. Having kept well documented notes on all the sources, I thought over exactly what I had learned through the research process. At that point, I turned my question into a tentative thesis. With this thesis in mind, I wrote out an outline for my research paper. Using this outline, I wrote the paper using the pertinent information of my research. While writing the paper, I realized that there were better sources than others. Some, though they seemed pertinent at the beginning of my research, did not hold information applicable to the thesis I had developed. While evaluating my different resources, I always asked if that source was applicable to the research topic, supported a specific point in my paper, and added to the argument I was trying to make. By using this criteria, I was able to narrow down the information in my paper to just the strongest points and fully develop my research question. It was a long process, but that I
am happy with the result of my research. I have tremendously advanced my research skills through this process and look forward to using them in the future.