1: Analyse the Question

Overview:
Start your research by analysing your assignment question. What is your lecture asking you to do? Are you being asked to write a letter of advice, an essay, complete a problem solving question or another form of assessment? By asking yourself what the question is you can start to define what type of information you will need to answer the question. To analyse your question see example 1 and example 2 below that will demonstrate ways in which you can break down your question into smaller researchable parts.

Example 1:
You were given the essay question: ‘Is legislation more powerful than case law?’ To get started, write a summary of the question and what information you want to find. For example, a summary of the above questions could be: I need to write an essay about case law and legislation. I will need to explain what case law and legislation are and then conclude which one is more powerful to answer the question.

Try it yourself:
Write a summary of your assignment question here:

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Research the Acrobat way

A C R O B A T
Analyze Consider Round up Obtain Boost Ask Test

Legal Research Planner

Use this planner to help you get started with your research.
Example 2:

A mind map can help you break down your question. For example, if you had the essay question: ‘With the rise of social media more people than ever will be able to have their voices heard. In Australia, how does social media affect freedom of speech, and should any limits be placed on this freedom?’

You can break down the question using a mind map to outline the information you will need to find:

Try it yourself:

Draw a mind map of your assignment question below:
**2: Consider the Legal Issues**

**Overview:**
Identify the main legal issues that you will need to find information on. For example, are there particular points of law you will need to consider, what area of law will you be looking at and what issues will you need to find information on?

**Example:**
If you had the problem question such as: ‘Bob dies in his home in Darwin after a long illness without leaving a will. Susan his daughter has been looking after Bob for the last 6 years and wants to know if she can still live in her father’s house. Susan comes to you for legal advice, what questions would you need to ask Susan during a client interview and what would you advise her?’

In this example some of the legal issues you would need to find information on include: *what is the law that governs intestacy in the Northern Territory, is it important whether Susan was looking after Bob and living in the house, does it matter if she has siblings?*

**Try it yourself:**
Write out the main legal issues for your assignment:

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3: Round up Legal Definitions

Overview:
Use legal dictionaries and encyclopaedias from the Law Guide to help define important terms in your assignment. This will help you understand the main legal concepts and may bring to your attention important considerations.

Example:
If you had an essay on examining the use of equitable estoppel in contract law as a remedy, start with a search defining estoppel in the Australian Law Dictionary or Macquarie Dictionary.

Try it yourself:
List terms you will need to find a definition for and then write a summary of what each word means:

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### 4: Obtain Secondary Resources

**Overview:**
Use resources such as books and journals to research the general areas of law you are looking at. These resources may help you outline issues of law in that area, relevant legislation and significant case law. You can search for books and journals using keywords in the main search box on the library home page.

**Example:**
If your assignment was examining the division of powers between the state and the Commonwealth government, start with finding a constitutional law book that will give you an overview of the topic. Start with searching Library Search with the keywords: *Constitutional law Australia* then limit results to books.

**Try it yourself:**
Write down the title of a book or journal article on your topic:

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### 5: Boost Your Research with Primary Resources

**Overview:**
In many assessment pieces you will need to find primary sources of law to support your argument or discussion. Make a note, when reading secondary resources, of any importance cases or legislation on your topic. Search and locate these resources for your assignment.

**Example:**
If you were completing an assignment on property law and native title you could list relevant cases such that have had a significant impact on the law and the name of the pieces of legislation that provide for native title.

**Try it yourself:**
List some of your primary sources below (is there a major case on your topic?):

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6: Ask Yourself if You Have Enough Information

Overview:
Now you have some primary and secondary resources on your topic you can conduct a search to fill any gaps in your research. Think about what you already have on the topic and fill in any missing parts that you need to complete your assignment task. You may have to undertake multiple searches to find information on different legal issues. To start searching, think about what keywords best describe the information you are looking for. A keyword is a word or concept that is of significance to your assignment question.

Example 1:
If you had an assignment on negligence and health professionals you could search using keywords such as: *duty of care, negligence, doctor, medical treatment, medical procedure* etc. Pick a database from the Law Guide to start searching.

Try it yourself:
Write down some keywords that you can start searching with:

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Example 2:
As you research it is important to record your process. Record the name of the database you used and the key words that you used to get results, this will assist you in determining if you need to use other resources or change your keywords and refine your search. It is also important to document the resources that you find as this will assist you with referencing in your assignment.

Try it yourself:
List one tool that you will start searching (e.g. database name):

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7: Test and Analyse your Results

Overview:
When you have found resources for your assignment it is important to consider the quality of the information you have collected. When you are formulating your arguments or discussion you want to rely on the best quality information that is of a high academic level.

Example:
Run your resources through the CRAAP test which stands for:

- **Currency**: when was the work published, is it out of date for the topic? Often older case law and journal articles may be misleading in that the law may have changed, if you are using older resources make sure the principles still apply.
- **Relevancy**: does it have detailed analysis, what is the readership level? Have you used the best examples, e.g. is there better case law examples or cases that carry more weight than others.
- **Authority**: who are the authors and their credentials? Was your case from a higher or lower court in Australia and look at the qualification and expertise of the author of a journal article, are they an expert in their area?
- **Accuracy**: can you verify the source, are there other sources cited in the bibliography? You may wish to consider whether the resources have jurisdictional limitations coming from interstate or overseas.
- **Purpose**: is there bias in the work, is there a particular perspective?

Try it yourself:
Run one of your resources through the test- do you still think it will be good to use for your assignment?

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