No one ever tells you about the difficulty of conducting quality research, it just turns into reality. In high school, they teach simple and basic techniques within a library. College, however approaches research in a much more digital manner. I poured less time into scouring books and more into finding peer-reviewed articles. I struggled, to say the least. That is, until this past semester. I had the opportunity to receive instruction from a professional library staff member and the difference is clear.

Before delving deep into research here at KSU, a topic had to surface. Full disclosure, everything started with a bunch of word vomiting. Competition clearly surfaced as a part of future research, but its role was less obvious. When the topic count hit 33, I sought help. I needed to process this massive amount of information vocally and thus set up an appointment with one of my professors, Dr. Tim Steffensmeier. He listened to all of those topic concepts and helped to merge the train of thought through the common themes of message framing and risk. Without this guidance, I could have ended up doing a criticism of parenting literature. In COMM 550 (Senior Colloquium), fellow students helped narrow this topic even further to focus on financial risk. Finally, with some polishing, my topic came to focus on how competition moderates the perception of risk in investment decisions.

Now that I had a broad topic for research, refinement turned my basic topic into 2 hypotheses and 3 research questions. My hypotheses fixated on the moderation of competition, but the research questions focused on the moderation of both competition and risk aversion. These hypotheses and research questions (topic) drove the research that I conducted.

During the process of narrowing down my topic, the Senior Colloquium class had a guest lecture from a Hale Library staff member, Laura Bonella. This experience exposed me to some incredible tools available for use through KSU libraries. She walked the class step-by-step

through the process of selecting appropriate databases and refining searches to produce the most applicable and beneficial sources. Beforehand, I only utilized Communication & Mass Media Complete (highly suggested for Communication Studies research). While she still encouraged the use of this database, she also recommended others and ultimately led me to utilize ProQuest Research Library, and SAGE Research Methods Online. Naturally, this is not an exhaustive list of all the databases used nor does it include outside research tools. I used the KSU libraries databases during two distinct phases of research, broad and targeted.

My research story began with a broad and investigative phase. Under Laura's guidance, I learned how to pinpoint key words and leave my options open so as to use the interlibrary loan system. I would sample nearly any article that contained the key words that I searched for. Since Laura helped broaden how I viewed and utilized the KSU libraries databases, I examined 15-25 articles at a time. I cannot explain the feeling of finding one incredible article and then accidentally clicking onto another browser tab. Thankfully, when I did find an applicable article, I quickly added it to my RefWorks profile so I could easily access it in the future. Honestly, I cannot believe that I previously functioned without RefWorks. This tool was critical for the preliminary research I conducted. For example, instead of leaving up 15 browser tabs, I could close the tabs that held articles that I saved to RefWorks for later reference and scour the remaining tabs purposefully.

Three reasons stand out as primary benefits of RefWorks. First, as mentioned above, this tool allows for quick storage of references for future use. I cut back on my over-use of browser tabs and reduced anxiety just by saving references for later. Second, RefWorks can build a bibliography containing stored references according to a selected style, APA for example. RefWorks found and structured pertinent information and provided a foundation from which to

build a reference list. Finally, RefWorks allows for the sorting of references into folders. For example, I sorted sources according to topic, however, folders could also be used to separate sources by project. I find it truly unfortunate that I was not exposed to this tool earlier. However, I count myself lucky to have been taught about its purpose and utility for my undergraduate research project. Its guidance through the first phase of research was paramount.

The second stage of research became much more focused. Instead of looking at every article that matched key words, I looked closely at the abstracts. The abstracts became gatekeepers of my research. If the abstract did not seem to directly correlate with the intention of my search, I did not continue reading that source. At this point, I sought very specialized information to further the cause of research for my hypotheses and research questions. I spent my time much more sparingly than through the first phase. If the abstracts seemed applicable to my specified research, I then sampled the paper. In one instance, an article that was not available online had to be acquired through the interlibrary loan system to evaluate its application to my research. Typically, a sampling began with the introduction and then went directly to the conclusions. The intros gave me a good idea of what the research focused on and the conclusions demonstrated the usefulness of the information. When an article showed correlation with my research, I dedicated time to read through all applicable sections of that source. This phase helped me to select quality resources and build my survey.

Kansas State University resources helped me conduct research. After narrowing down a topic, KSU database tools and RefWorks helped to simplify and organize my research. Without Laura Bonella, my professors, or KSU libraries and all their tools, my undergraduate research project would have suffered. Conducting research for an undergraduate research project is never

easy, but my experience with KSU libraries and their tools taught me that it also does not have to

be difficult.