My research process was guided by my central thesis of the alternative energy paper; to lead the United States into a cleaner and independent future, renewable energy sources must be implemented to meet the growing energy demand. I first created an outline to organize and lead my research. The introduction establishes the contemporary issue, sets up the argument and institutes a thesis. Following the introduction, the outline includes advantages and disadvantages of fossil fuels, wind, solar, hydroelectric, geothermal and bioenergy along with counterarguments within each topic to support my thesis.

I began using Bankier Library’s online catalog quick search tool. I used a keyword like alternative energy and modified the search with synonyms like renewable and sustainable energy to give more results. I also modified the search by typing in subtopics like solar power and bioenergy. These searches brought me to a variety of books to check out. I wrote down the call numbers and hunted for them in the stacks. It was easy to find them thanks to my previous experience working in Moon Library at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. All the books I searched for were nearby each other and I found even more books on the shelves with similar topics that didn’t show up on my search. Overwhelming at first, I started reading general information about how alternative energies work and their pros and cons. I used the online database, Points of View Reference Center, to get ideas for counterarguments to include to make my paper stronger. This led me to using a variety of databases such as Academic ASAP, GreenFILE, and CQ Researcher, which gave me useful articles. On the other hand, when searching within databases like Academic Search Premier and LexisNexis Academic, the articles I found were either too scientific or did not support my thesis.
I found that typing in general topics like solar energy or wind power gave me more articles that contained several points of interest rather than using a more specific search like the cost of solar energy. I went to the results containing academic journals first due to their credibility, and then looked through the newspaper and magazine articles.

I mainly spent most of my time researching throughout the databases, but I also decided to try searching Google for general information. Unexpectedly, I came across the United States Department of Energy web pages and that led me to a whole new collection of statistics and informative support about all the topics for my paper. I took information from the government’s web pages and from their online pamphlets like 20% Wind Energy by 2030.

Excellent sources included information that supports my thesis and counterarguments. Other less useful sources went against my arguments or were too narrowly focused on topics such as how geothermal plants operate. I also used Noodle Tools to organize my sources and generate my citations. This made the research process much easier, especially when it came time to format the finished works cited page.

From this research experience I learned that it requires much time, organization and critical thinking. Not only is the research process focused on supporting the thesis, but it also examines the counter thesis. Including counterarguments will cut out any weaknesses within the paper. After going through many searches within several databases, I became used to the research process and felt in control of my research. The process helped improve my search term strategies and navigation skills. My research experience at Brookdale Community College helps prepare me for future research projects at my next college.