• Assume that people want to help you. However, you must remember that most adults are very busy people. When you contact an adult, he or she will most likely need a reminder about helping you. So don’t be afraid to make a phone call and then send a reminder note to the person in a day or two (“Thanks for agreeing to help me with my research. It would really be great if you could help me locate that information.”).

• Be persistent but don’t be a pest! Two or three letters to someone asking for information is being persistent. Twenty letters to the same person is most likely being a pest!

• Always provide your name, phone number, e-mail address, or street address to the person you contacted so he/she knows where to respond (even if it’s your second or third contact attempt).

Telephoning skills
How many of you love making phone calls to people you have never met to get information? You may be really good at that type of thing. But, on the other hand, you may be a bit shy about doing this. If you want to research at the advanced level, you will most likely have to make some phone calls, but the task does not have to be scary.

If you jot down a few ideas before you make the call, the call will be much easier to make. Consider using the Telephone Call Script worksheet to prepare you for phone calls that could help you discover excellent information about your history topic.

Letter writing and e-mail skills
One way to gather sources is to write a business letter requesting information from others. This technique is so helpful that your teacher may require you to do it to get you started on practicing research communication skills.

The following are some basic steps for writing a business letter:

Step 1. Find the Address
The first step is to find the name and address—regular mail or e-mail—of a person or organization with information about your topic. Finding this information is easier than you might think. For example, if you are researching a topic related to the automobile industry, and you learn that Detroit is an important place in automobile history, you could write a letter to the historical society in Detroit, Michigan. There are many ways to find names and addresses.

• You can talk to a librarian at your school or city library.

• You can use search engines such as Yahoo! that have address directories.

• You can look at other sources you’ve already collected. (Sometimes a research source makes reference to a person or organization that you may be able to contact. Also, you can check to see if any of your sources have a bibliography. If so, you may find helpful information there as well.)

• E-mail and regular mail addresses can often be found by a simple Internet search.

Step 2. Set up your letter in a business letter format
Your letter needs to sound more professional and formal than a letter to a friend. Put the letter into proper business letter format with the following sections:

HEADING
• Put your home or school’s street address on line one.
• Put your home or school’s city, state abbreviation, and zip code on line two.
• Put the date you wrote the letter on line three.
• Do NOT put your name in the heading.
• The heading is not required in an e-mail because the computer automatically provides the information.

INSIDE ADDRESS
• Put the name and title of the person to whom you are writing (if you know it) on line one.
• Put the name of the company on line two.
• Put the complete address on lines three and four.

SALUTATION
• Write the word Dear followed by the name of the person or organization to whom you are writing and end with a colon.
• Capitalize the first letter of all words in the salutation.

BODY
Write the letter in complete sentences and in paragraphs, and include information outlined in Step 3 below.