How to Find Background Info for That Pesky Background Reading

The best place to begin is usually at the beginning so you should start by identifying **keywords** and combinations of those keywords to locate articles, books, and/or book chapters that will give you a **broad overview** of your topic. At this point, you should peruse a **variety of sources** so that you have a basic understanding of your topic from various points of view and schools of thought. Consider books, encyclopedias, journals, and magazines (either in print or printed from the databases). Remember that many of these resources also provide **bibliographies**—lists of other works on your subject—which can help guide your background reading and subsequently your research.

My advice/tips, which you should definitely follow since I *am* the EE expert…
1. Start an EE notebook, a ridiculously large three-ringed binder. You're going to need it!
2. Complete the **Reading Log**; you will need it for meetings with your supervisor.
3. Keep copies of **everything** that you read (See, you're already filling up that binder!). This allows you to highlight, take notes, ask questions, etc. Be sure to copy all publication and copyright information so that you have it for your Works Cited. You do not want to have to go back and try to locate your sources later, trust me!
4. Create a Word document for all the **bibliographies** that you come across in digital sources. Copy and paste them all into this document so that you can easily see trends in authors, researchers, publications, etc. on your topic. Again, better to have too much than not enough.
5. Use the **Keywords Worksheet**. This tool will help you to avoid repetition, which you do not have time for, and searches that will not yield any useful results.
6. If skimming search results, if you don't find anything useful in the first 20 hits, abandon ship and try a different set of keywords.
7. Avoid using search engines because they do not verify or filter by authenticity, quality, or source reputability. Search engines = bad
8. Wikipedia *could* be useful in the beginning (Can you believe I said that?!). Here's how…search your keyword or phrase. Ignore everything in the resulting entry and scroll to the bottom of the page where you will find the **bibliography** (a.k.a. legitimate sources) referenced to write the page by actual scholars.
9. Utilize the databases from the library's **Databases & Digital Tools** page. JSTOR and Gale will probably be the most valuable for the masses, but there are several other resources there that may lend themselves to various topics. Remember to use the Advanced Search feature in all these databases so that you can narrow your search to the appropriate field. Advanced search = good
10. Also from the **Databases & Digital Tools** page, have a look at the Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL), where you will find thousands of articles from specialized reference books as well as **bibliographies**.

Five goals for your background reading:
1. To familiarize you with the topic in a broad sense.
2. To gauge whether your topic is too broad, too narrow, or just right.
3. To locate valuable resources that you can come back to during the research process.
4. To provide focus for your topic and begin to consider what assertions you might make.
5. To focus your topic enough to form a good research question.