Some tips for producing a research paper

The assignment for the research paper is to focus on a particular source of your choice (from any time, any place, treating any subject matter) and to analyze it both as a text and as a book (or other physical form) in its historical context. The goal of the assignment is to make the questions posed by the history of the book and of reading contribute to our understanding of questions in intellectual or cultural history. Attend to the historical significance of your argument, without exaggerating the strength of your claims. Often a paper is strengthened by having a more modest argument; in many cases the significance of an argument is not related to how strongly it is formulated, but rather to how carefully the argument is framed (e.g. by considering the existing historiography).

GETTING STARTED
There are still no major reference works in the history of the book (to my knowledge!), although I have ordered the first volume of a 3-volume Dictionnaire encyclopédique du livre. But many of the standard recent reference works on different times and places include valuable information and leads on our topics (e.g. under: book, literacy, author...)
- Encyclopedia of Early Christianity (1997)
- Dictionary of the Middle Ages (1989)
- Europe since 1945: an Encyclopedia (2001)
- Encyclopedia of American cultural and intellectual history (2001)
- Encyclopedia of Islam (1960)
- Encyclopedia Judaica (1972)

For reference on material bibliography: Philip Gaskell, A New Introduction to Bibliography.

RESEARCHING YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE:

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION about those named in your source (author, printer, dedicatee, sources cited). Best resources are in the Widener Ref Room: biographical dictionaries, SAUR biographical database on microfilm (with bound index volumes).

My favorites, for early modern Europe:
- Louis Moréri, Grand dictionnaire historique (non-circulating in Widener stacks!)
- Johannes Zedler, Universal-lexikon (early 18th) available on-line at: http://mdz.bib-bvb.de/digbib/zedler

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT PRIMARY SOURCES

IN PRINT:
multivolume national catalogues are the best source for older books (currently in Widener reference room at the far end of the room)
- Bibliothèque Nationale
- British Library

German catalogue for 1700-1900; and DV16 (located in the stacks) for 16th century imprints.
National Union Catalogue (also impressive for non-U.S. imprints)
Many specialized bibliographies exist for imprints from particular times and places (see library
handout for some of them—consulting a reference librarian would help you locate others)
ON-LINE
Many of these catalogues have more or less complete and more or less user-friendly on-line
versions:
see WORLDCAT on our e-resources; and the "catalogs beyond Harvard" link
Gabriel is a link to major European national library catalogs on-
line: http://www.bl.uk/gabriel/index.html

HISTORICAL LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
To offer a close reading of primary sources, remember that it is important to know consider what a
word means and how its meaning may be different from modern usage. One approach is to use old
dictionaries (e.g. for the French case, Nicot, Thesaurus de la langue française, 1601, Antoine Furietière
or Richelet, from late 17th ct); a more complete overview is provided by a good recent historical
language dictionary, e.g.
Oxford English Dictionary
e.g. Edmond Huguet, Dictionnaire du français du 16e siècle

IDENTIFYING RELEVANT SECONDARY SOURCES
Historical abstracts and America: History and Life
Arts and Humanities Citation Index
FRANCIS (strong in religion, history of art and lit)
History of Science
International Medieval Bibliography CD-ROM: on research workstations in Widener Reading
Room.
Iter: Gateway to the Renaissance—database of articles on the Renaissance
Periodical Contents Index: index to thousands of periodicals since 1990.
Philosopher's Index
Religion Index
ETC: can also use search function on e-resources pages!

WRITING
Your research paper will need:
-a title; An argument which shows a good command of the secondary literature on your topic
-evidence: good use of quotations from your primary source
-nuance: address potential counterevidence and counterarguments explicitly. Acknowledge the
limitations of your research. Use moderation in judgment
-precision and concision of expression: words are tools—use the ones most appropriate to your
purposes.
-enthusiasm!

HOLLIS tricks you should know about (ask a friend or librarian if needed):
email yourself a HOLLIS record; modify search (restricting the results of a search you have already
done); expanded search: limiting a search by language, date, publisher etc; following up the subject
heading of a book you like; reordering the results of a search by title or date; manage your account!