Library Research

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Learning Outcomes

- Overview of the information cycle.
- Investigating a research topic.
- Searching for and locating relevant information.
- Evaluating information.
- Using information
Library Assistance: Start here
When an event occurs, the information available about that event progresses from the reporting of facts to the publication of scholarly literature.
Minutes to Hours

- Minutes – News sources report event. Facts may not be accurate.
- Hours – Public opinion begins to form and circulate.
Days to Weeks

• Days – new information, including expert opinions added to news stories.
• Weeks – Analysis begins. Be aware that much of this is preliminary and biased.
Months to Years

• Months – academics and experts begin researching the event. Articles begin to be published in scholarly/peer reviewed journals.
• Years – academics begin to summarize their findings in books.
• Several years – overviews begin to appear in textbooks and encyclopedias.
A Cycle of Revolving Research - When first learning about a topic you can start and move to any point in the research cycle depending on the type of information you need.
The information you find and use along the cycle of research can also be broken down into three types of sources: primary, secondary and tertiary.
Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Sources

• Secondary

**Definition**
- Works that analyze, assess or interpret an historical event, era or phenomenon, generally utilizing primary sources to do so.

**Characteristics**
- Interpretation of information, usually written well after the event; reviews or critiques

**Examples**
- Journal articles, editorial articles, literary criticism, book reviews, biographies, textbooks
Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Sources

- **Tertiary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sources that identify and locate primary and secondary sources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Reference works, collections or lists of primary and secondary sources, finding tools for sources</td>
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<td>Examples</td>
<td>Encyclopedias, Indexes, Abstracts, Bibliographies, Library databases and catalogs</td>
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Resist the temptation to start researching immediately. Don't waste your time diving into research until you know what the assignment requires.

Is it a report?
Is it an analytical paper?
Is it an argumentative essay?

You need to know before you begin! The type of assignment will determine what kind of research you need to do, and how you need to organize and present that research in your paper. Even an "A" quality report can earn an "F" if the assignment is to write an argumentative essay.
try to choose something that interests you. Even if your professor assigns you a topic, you can choose an aspect of that topic that interests you.
Investigating Step 3: Writing a working thesis statement
All the time and effort you put into researching is wasted unless you can focus on what you need. How do you do that? By establishing a working thesis statement. Plan to revise it several times as you learn more about your topic.

A thesis statement focuses your ideas into one or two sentences. It should present the topic of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic. Your thesis statement should tell your reader what the paper is about and also help guide your writing and keep your argument focused. Example of an analytical thesis statement:
An analysis of the college admission process reveals one challenge facing counselors: accepting students with high test scores or students with strong extracurricular backgrounds.
The paper that follows should:
Explain the analysis of the college admission process
Explain the challenge facing admissions counselors
Example of an expository (explanatory) thesis statement:
The life of the typical college student is characterized by time spent studying, attending
class, and socializing with peers.
The paper that follows should:
Explain how students spend their time studying, attending class, and socializing with peers
Example of an argumentative thesis statement:
High school graduates should be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college in order to increase their maturity and global awareness.
The paper that follows should:
Present an argument and give evidence to support the claim that students should pursue community projects before entering college
Not every thesis statement can be supported. You may search for sources to support your thesis statement - and come up empty. Some topics may be too current or too obscure for coverage in academic journals. Or you may find too many articles to wade through if your research question is broad. Be flexible with your topic, thesis statement, and research question. Revising them early in the process based on what you DO find will save you time in the long run.

Example: The only writing you are going to find today about how the Pope’s visit to the US was received is going to be news and blog accounts. Scholarly articles are not
going to appear for months, and scholarly books are probably a year away.
When you know *what you want* and *what you need*... ...you are ready to *search* for information.
Remember, the "quest" of all your research efforts should be to answer your research question
There are a variety of information sources. **Where should you look?**

1. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, atlases, and handbooks are great starting points for overviews of topics or quick facts.
2. Newspapers and magazines are reader-friendly and good for current events. Journals are more academic in nature.
3. Books cover a topic thoroughly, though they may not be as current as other sources.

And there's the Web . . .
A single search can link you to a thousand Web sites. The Web can be a good source for some information but the library is a more efficient place to search for articles. On the Web, you may need to wade through many fragments of articles before you find full text that is freely available and appropriate for college-level research. If you use Web resources, evaluate them carefully.

**Bad for:**
- Copyright or ownership of content can be unclear
- Some content is edited on a minute-by-minute basis by non-experts
- Snippets of scholarly information (citations) seldom link to full text without the library's linking services

### Web Resources

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pro:</th>
<th>Con:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Book and movie reviews</td>
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<td>- Travel information</td>
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<td>- Government and non-profit web sites</td>
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You’ll find plenty of sources of information, but some will fit your assignment better than others.

Finding information is not the end of research. You want information that supports the point you’re trying to make. Some sources can be outdated, biased, or just plain wrong, and using that information makes it a lot more difficult for you to present a convincing argument. **Taking the time to critically evaluate information as you find it will help you to avoid wrong turns in the research process.**

**Clue 1: Currency**
Currency is important because information can quickly become obsolete. Supporting your thesis statement with facts that have been superseded by new research or recent events weakens your argument. Of course, not all assignments require the most current information; older materials can provide an historical or comprehensive understanding of your topic. **How do you know if the timeliness of your information is appropriate?**
When was the information published or last updated?
Have newer articles been published on your topic?
Are links or references to other sources up to date?
Is your topic in an area that changes rapidly, like technology or popular culture?

Clue 2: Authority
Authority is important in judging the credibility of the author's assertions. In a trial regarding DNA evidence, a jury gives far more authority to what a genetics specialist has to say compared to someone off the street.

How do you know if an author is an authority on your topic?
What are the author's credentials?
Is the author affiliated with an educational institution or prominent organization?
Can you find information about the author from reference books or the Internet?
Do other books or articles cite the author?

Accuracy
How do you know if your source is accurate?
Are there statements you know to be false?
Are there errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar?
Was the information reviewed by editors or subject experts before it was published?
What citations or references support the author’s claims?
What do other people have to say about the topic?

Relevance
Relevance is important because you are expected to support your ideas with pertinent information. A source detailing Larry Summers marriage and family life would not be germane to his theories in economics.

How do you know if your source is relevant?
Does the information answer your research question?
Does the information meet the stated requirements of the assignment?
Is the information too technical or too simplified for you to use?
Does the source add something new to your knowledge of your topic?

Purpose
Purpose is important because books, articles, and Web pages exist to educate, entertain, or sell a product or point of view. Some sources may be frivolous or commercial in nature, providing inadequate, false, or biased information. Other sources are more ambiguous concerning their partiality. Varied points of view can be valid, as long as they are based upon good reasoning and careful use of evidence.

How do you determine the purpose of your source?
Why did the author or publisher make this information available?
Is there an obvious bias or prejudice?
Are alternative points of view presented?
Does the author omit important facts or data that might disprove a claim?
Does the author use strong or emotional language?
Relying on more than one source for information will help you decide what is or isn’t accurate and whether something is relevant to your assignment. Think about how the new information fits in with what you already know and how you want to present your argument. Making notes about and organizing information helps you keep track of what might or might not be useful to your project.
In Contrast ...

... an academic library efficiently links you to books, articles, newspapers, historical information, music, maps, videos, and full-text online resources.

All have been selected to meet the varied research needs of college students. +

In addition, there are librarians--research experts--who can help you efficiently locate a few good resources instead of a thousand so-so ones.
Citing Sources - Why

- Reflect work you have put into locating and exploring your sources.
- Help readers understand the context of your paper & are a courtesy to the reader, who may share your interest in a particular area of study.
- Acknowledge those authors who contributed to your learning and your work.
- By illustrating your own learning process, also draw attention to the originality and legitimacy of your own ideas.
- You demonstrate your integrity and skill as a responsible student and participant in your field of study.
Direct quotes of more than one word. If the author’s words are powerful or you need to be specific for your argument, the authors’ words can be used as a direct quote.

Paraphrasing or summarizing. If you want to use someone else’s idea to help you make your point or to support your own ideas, in this case you would “translate” the ideas into your own words.

Information which may be common knowledge but still unfamiliar to your reader. This would also include statistical information which may be familiar information but still requires confirmation.

Not just books or articles should be cited. Any source that you use for information can and should be cited including interviews, websites, TV programs, etc.

Whenever you are not sure if something should be cited, err on the side of caution and cite sources.