



How to Use the Research Process

Reference Collection

Reference works are valuable resources that quickly provide background information about a topic. They provide the who, what, when, where, and sometimes why of a topic. From this you can begin a list of relevant terms and keywords. Some reference works will have a bibliography at the end of the entry or in a separate section. They are available in print or online.

Books

Search the library's catalog for books in the collection and ebooks available through the databases. A good searching technique is to start with keyword searching. If you don't know the correct subject headings, review your results and then search the subject headings from those results or by subject in Quick Search.

Periodicals

Periodicals are useful for three primary reasons. They provide information that is current and timely, contain the latest discussions on a topic, and cover topics not yet published in book form. Periodicals are created for different audiences. Some are for general readers and others for academics, scholars, and researchers.

Periodical research has two steps: first, you want to find relevant citations. Next, you will locate the actual articles. There are two ways to find citations by using bibliographies and footnotes and by using periodical indexes. Indexes are available in both print and electronic format. Electronic indexes can search multiple years in one search and allows for keyword searching. Electronic indexes, available through Research Databases on the library web page might also include abstracts and / or full-text articles.

Once you have the citation of an article, you need to locate the periodical title of that article if the database does not include the full-text. Use the journal hyperlink displayed in the search results. If the library does not have access to the full-text of the article you seek, consider using inter-library loan.

Research Databases

The Research Databases are a combination of

periodicals, books, essays, encyclopedias, and other information resources. They can contain indexing, abstracting, and / or full-text. Full-text can be html, scanned image (PDF) or a link to full text in another database. Because of copyright or licensing restrictions, publisher restrictions, and cost not every citation is going to have an accompanying full-text.

Internet

The Internet is the interconnection of many different computer networks: private, corporate, commercial, educational, and governmental. Anyone can create a web page. Beware of information.

There are several ways to locate web pages, directories, indexes, search engines, megasearch engines, webliographies, and web gateways. Unlike a library catalog, which will search an entire library's holdings, each search engine only retrieves a small portion of the available information on the web. So you will need to search in more than one place.

Information on the Internet does not go through any review process and therefore it is the responsibility of the researcher to determine whether the information on web site is authoritative, useful, accurate, objective, and current.

Evaluation

All information, whatever its format or means of distribution needs to be evaluated for authority, accuracy, content, and usefulness. In print form, a work (book or journal article) is screened by editors, publishers, reviewers, librarians, etc., before it is put on the library's shelves and yet it requires further evaluation by the researcher.

The following questions should be asked:

- a. Who wrote it? – Authority
- b. Is the information accurate? – Accuracy
- c. Why was it written? – Purpose
- d. What is the bias? – Objectivity
- e. Is the information dated? - Currency