

Research Tips

According to the seven pillars of information literacy (SCONUL – Society of College, National and University Libraries), the core ones are identifying and knowing the scope. The rest includes plan, gather, evaluate, manage and present.

Identify

To be able to identify a lack of knowledge in a subject area; identify a search topic/question and define it using simple terminology; articulate current knowledge on a topic; recognise a need for information to achieve a purpose; use background information to underpin research; take personal responsibility, manage time effectively to complete a search

Scope

Is able to know “what you don’t know” to identify any information gaps; identify which types of information will meet the need; identify the available search tools, such as general and subject specific resources at different levels; identify different formats in which information is provided

Plan

Be able to scope the search question clearly and in appropriate language; define a search strategy by using appropriate keywords and concepts, defining and setting limits; select the most appropriate search tools; identify controlled vocabularies and taxonomies to aid in searching if appropriate; identify appropriate search techniques to use; identify specialist search tools appropriate to the need

Gather

Be able to use a range of retrieval tools and resources effectively; construct complex searches appropriate to different digital and print resources; access full text information; use online and print help and can find personal and expert help and also identify when the information need has not been met

Evaluate

Be able to distinguish between different information resources; choose suitable material on the search topic; assess the quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, reputation & credibility of the resources found; read critically identifying key concepts and arguments; relate the information found to the original search strategy and lastly appraise and evaluate findings

Manage

Be able to use bibliographic software if appropriate to manage information; cite printed and electronic resources using suitable referencing styles; create appropriately formatted bibliographies; demonstrate the awareness of issues relating to ethics, data protection, copyright, plagiarism and other intellectual property issues; meet standards of conduct for academic integrity and use appropriate data management software and techniques to manage data

Present

Be able to use information and data found to address the original question; summarise and report verbally and in writing; incorporate new information into context of existing knowledge; analyse and present data appropriately; synthesise and appraise new and complex information from different sources; communicate effectively using appropriate writing styles and as well as verbally

The Library provides help with plan, gather and evaluate.

Plan – ways of searching – Boolean – keywords

Gather – know the range of resources

Evaluate – know which are suitable for the research need

Evaluating the Range of Resources

- Authority
- Relevance
- Currency
- Reliability
- Accuracy
- Audience
- Scope
- Usability
- Objectivity

Reference materials – encyclopaedias, dictionaries, handbooks, atlases, bibliographies, lexicons, thesaurus.

Encyclopaedias provide background information and bibliographies; useful for self-educating; learning the terminology, vocabulary.

Dictionaries also help with understanding new terminology eg.

- *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* by M S DeMoss (2001) R 487.4 DEM
- *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* by Stanley J. Grenz; David Guretzki; Cherith Fee Nordling (1999) R 230.03 GRE
- *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* by Arthur G. Patzia; Anthony J. Petrotta (2002) R 220.3 PAT
- *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* by Millard J. Erickson (1994) R 230.03 ERI
- *Concise Dictionary of Religion* by Irving Hexham (1993) R 200.3 HEX
- *Concise Dictionary of Early Christianity* by J F Kelly (1992) R 270.103 KEL

Books – include, reference, new, closed reserve, pamphlets, vertical files

Either from your reading list, bibliographies from other books, journals, or whatever source, evaluate its relevance/content, currency/timeliness, authority (credentials of authors and publishers), intended audience/ type of books eg. popular, devotionals, Introductions (books with the word Introduction on the cover), Textbooks, Scholarly (Academic monographs or published by university press or professional bodies) and are there book reviews on the book

Good to note all the first few pages of the book including contents page, and the index if it has the keywords you need to cover for the assignment. Read also introduction, preface and the jacket of the book.

Journals – current and past issues

These could be also called periodicals, serials, magazines, however, it is important to evaluate its academic/scholarliness. You can group journals into 3 types –

Scholarly journals also called academic, peer-reviewed and refereed – inform, report original research, lengthy articles with citations and bibliographies, author credentials included

Trade/professional journals – current trends, news, research, statistics and forecasts, sources cited, authored by staff writers, freelance journals, less often by scholars

Popular, special interest magazines – no in-depth analysis, inform, entertain; sources not generally cited, written by freelance journalists, editorial staff or not identified authors

Internet

Evaluating Web Pages: Questions to Ask & Strategies for Getting the Answers

Eight-point evaluation checklist from the UC Berkeley Library:

- What can the URL tell you? (generic domains - com: commercial entities, edu: educational institution, gov: government body, org: organisations, net: network infrastructures, int: international organisations)
- Who wrote the page? Is he, she, or the authoring institution a qualified authority?
- Is it dated? Current, timely?
- Is information cited authentic?
- Does the page have overall integrity and reliability as a source?
- What's the bias?
- Could the page or site be ironic, like a satire or a spoof?
- If you have questions or reservations, how can you satisfy them?

Databases

A library database helps you locate journal articles, ebooks, conference papers, book chapters and other dissertations and book reviews. They are commercial products which the library subscribes to enable users to search online and usually cannot be accessed by searching the Internet in general.

Library subscribes to databases that helps has journal articles, and e-books, lastly, indexes:

EBSCOhost – *ATLA Serials*, *ATLA Religion Database Index*, *Religion and Philosophy Collection*, e-books

ProQuest – Religion Collection

Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts

EBL (E-book library)

ARI Online – index of Australasian religious and theological periodicals

Information Retrieval/search tips

- **Wildcards** search: use ? to represent a single character eg. wom?n retrieves words with woman or women.
- **Truncation** using ? or * retrieves a minimum of the first three characters of the term followed by its variations eg. securit? or securit* retrieves security, securities, securitization etc.
- **Boolean operators:**
 - AND** will return results with all the words entered
 - OR** will return any of the terms entered in the search box
 - NOT** will result in words eg. Israel – Gentiles will have results for Israel and not Gentiles
 - “God is love” **quotation marks** will result in all the words located directly next to each other
 - () **parentheses** will result in more precise searches eg. dog (walking OR feeding OR grooming) - results will be dog walking OR dog feeding OR dog grooming
- **Phrase searching**
 - Use of quotation marks results in an exact match eg Near East and not the words near and east