

## Research Tips

Using the Internet is commonplace, however, ensuring the information is accurate is another thing, hence, one has to be selectively, curate and evaluate critically with what you find on the Internet.

Importantly, keep a record of the sites you use, and the URL/link and the day accessed them. Know your subject directories and search engines. Do not rely too much on the Internet with the proliferation of fake news and unknown/unreliable sources.

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; make use of online and print help; know when and where to 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 your research need

### 1. Evaluating the Range of Resources

- Authorship – establish author profile and credibility
- Relevance
- Currency – up-to-datedness
- Reliability
- Accuracy – free from errors, grammatical or spelling, edited and reviewed, sources provided
- Audience – intended audience clearly identified within the content
- Scope
- Usability
- Objectivity – author or publisher is not biased, content is covered with facts, opinion or propaganda

Source: [hostingfacts.com/evaluating-online-resources/](http://hostingfacts.com/evaluating-online-resources/)

### 2. Range of resources

**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, course reserves**

Books can come from either your reading list, bibliographies from other books, journals, or whatever source. Do evaluate its relevance/content, currency/timeliness, authority (credentials of authors and publishers), intended audience/ type of books.

Note there are many types of books: popular, devotionals, Introductions (books with the word Introduction on the cover), Textbooks, Scholarly (Academic monographs or published by university press or professional bodies) and find out if there are book reviews on a certain book to find out how others see it.

Good to note that 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 the 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.

You can look out for our e-journals which we have subscribed to, come in electronic format published by *Brill*, *Cambridge University Press*, *Mohr Siebeck*, *SAGE* and *Wiley*.

### Internet

Often Google searches are used, be careful what sites are accessed and the authenticity of them as well as the copyright restrictions. Also whether that access is safe or meaningful for us (the users). Open Access is a newcomer and need to be used with caution as well.

### [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: non-profit 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?

Web pages are subject to accidental and deliberate alteration, and may move or disappear without notification.

### Databases

Dedicated library database helps you locate journal articles, e-books, 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.

Our Library subscribes to the following databases that have journal articles, and e-books, lastly, indexes:

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

*ProQuest* – Religion Collection

*ProQuest* - Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts

*ProQuest e-Book Central* (formerly EBL) – e-books

*ARI Online* – index of Australasian religious and theological periodicals

### 3. Ways of searching - 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 NOT 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

#### 4. Present

Lastly, get down to writing your assignment. There are study skills books that may help with writing and presenting your work, and they are located in the course reserves section or you can find other books from similar locations/classifications in the library:

- *Beginning university: thinking, research and writing for success* by A Wallace, T Schirato and P Bright 371.30281 WAL
- *Communicating at university: skills for success* by N Rolls and P Wignell 808.02 ROL
- *English for theology* by G Kelly 428.0071 KEL
- *Reading, writing and reasoning* by G Fairbairn, C Winch 428.40711 FAI
- *Style: ten lessons in clarity and grace* and *Style: the basics of clarity and grace* both by J M Williams 808.02 WIL
- *The college writer: a guide to thinking, writing and researching* by R VanderMey, V Meyer, J Van Rys, D Kemper and P Sebranek 808.02 COL
- *The writer's handbook* by M R Beazley, G Marr 808.02 BEA
- *Write better: a lifelong editor on craft, art and spirituality* by A T Le Peau 808.02 LEP
- *How to write a theology essay* by M P Jensen 808.2 JEN