

Research Tips (revised 2021)

Preamble

Internet use for acquiring information is fraught with errors and dangers – and not to mention the bias, misinformation and fake news – it is important to use critically the information procured online. It is also important to be aware of how to behave ethically online, how to use social media, aware of digital footprints and privacy as well as e-safety (protecting yourself online) and copyright & legal issues which will not, however, be looked at in this document.

About a decade ago, it was important to be information literate - the seven pillars of information literacy (SCONUL – Society of College, National and University Libraries) states that the core ones are to identify and know the scope, then plan, gather, evaluate, manage and present your topic. With recent technological advances, digital literacy now dominates. The six key elements of digital literacy (Joint Information System Committee) include: ICT (Information Communication Technology)/computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, communication and collaboration, digital scholarship and learning skills.

Recently people educated up to high school would be competent in computer literacy and able to use computers for basic word processing and online searching and even e-commerce like online banking or purchase.

With increasing emphasis moving away from information literacy (prerequisites for performing well in higher education) to digital literacy, it is important to be media literate (use of various media, social or others), and to be able to communicate and collaborate (think Zoom concerts). Being digital savvy is important to produce up-to-the-minute videos (think TicTok) and instagrams that proliferate on the web. Always be ready to learn new skills and techniques.

However, it is here that we diverge from the present world, in that, producing a theological essay may require a different set of skills set. Bearing in mind, all the above skills are vital to survive this highly wired society .

If you do use the internet for research, do keep a record of the sites you use, and the URL/link and the day accessed them. Know your subject directories and search engines.

The Library at Trinity Theological College provides information literacy skills for your planning, gathering and evaluating your information. Make sure you address the question to your assignment.

Plan – ways of searching (what sites to use) – use of Boolean (AND, NOT, OR) – keywords or subject keywords

Gather – know the range of resources, primary sources, secondary sources, what is expected for the assignment

Evaluate – know which are suitable for your research need after you have gathered the information

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/

2. Range of resources (some available as e-books)

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 [location of the dictionary in the library]
- *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 books, new books, course reserves

Books to consult can be from either your reading list, bibliographies from other books on the topic, 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, contributors to the book, 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

Use of journals is particularly helpful for more recent viewpoints, books usually take longer to be published, hence journals are usually more current.

These could be also be 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, they come in electronic format published by *Brill, Cambridge University Press, Mohr Siebeck, SAGE and Wiley*.

The library holds mostly scholarly journals, and older journals back to 1927. About 50 titles are current with a total of 140 titles in all. The databases hold a lot more titles and archives older issues.

Internet

Often Google searches are used, be careful what sites are accessed and the authenticity of them as well as the copyright restrictions. **Google Scholar** though can yield some useful information. 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.

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

EBSCOhost – *Atla Religion Database with SerialsPLUS* (over 525 full-text titles), *Religion and Philosophy Collection* (over 200 full-text journals), *E-book Religion Collection* (around 9000 titles)

ProQuest – *Religion Database* (over 200 full-text journals)

ProQuest - *Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts* (around 1280 documents/books)

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

Different databases also have useful search tools, you can limit your search by keywords, subjects, title, year, author, publisher, some also allow limiting by Scripture – different books of the Bible, by chapter or verse even.

Should you really want something that you found from your search but the database do not have full text access, you can ask for an inter library loan which will cost a little (free for Higher Degree by Research students). This means we can ask from a library who has the article to provide to us. This may take up a longer time if it is a printed book, but articles normally take less time.

4. Present your assignment

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