

Sixth Form and College students

Using library resources to find information

DEFINING YOUR SEARCH TERMS

The first stage of any information search is to identify the key concepts of the topic you are researching. You need to turn your topic into a short statement, question or hypothesis and try to think of the keywords you might use to define it.

You can use the Search Strategy Grids provided to jot down any keywords you might use.

FINDING INFORMATION

There is obviously a lot of information on the internet but how can you tell whether it is valid or not? Many people use Google or Wikipedia but you cannot always be sure that the information you find there will be relevant, up-to-date, accurate and unbiased.

Some websites such as the Internet Detective provide guidance on what to look for when deciding whether or not to trust a website.

Internet Detective - www.vtstutorials.ac.uk/detective/index.html

USING THE LIBRARY WEBSITE

The JRUL has subject information pages where the subject specialists have provided a list of useful and trustworthy resources.

JRUL subject pages - www.manchester.ac.uk/library/academicsupport/subjects

LIBRARY SEARCH

Library Search is a new search engine which has been developed to allow you to search across all of the Library's books, journals, databases and other resources. You can access this from any computer linked to the internet at school or college or from home.

Library Search - www.manchester.ac.uk/library/searchresources/librarysearch

You can do a keyword search on any subject using the single search box then refine your search by a variety of criteria including:

- Topic
- Publication date
- Author
- Language

- Content type (eg book, article)

BOOKS

The Library obtains thousands of books each year to support the teaching and research of the University. Many books are recommended to students in course reading lists as it can be overwhelming when you first start looking for books on your topic.

Textbooks are a good starting point as they will give you a general overview of a subject and will usually include references to more detailed, specialised books and to relevant journal articles in the bibliography at the end of each chapter.

JOURNALS

Journals (also called serials or periodicals) are publications which come out at intervals (weekly, monthly etc) and contain a number of separate articles (papers) relating to the topic of the journal. This means that information in journals is much more up-to-date than in books which may have been written several years ago. This is very important in subjects like science, technology, medicine, economics and politics where current information is essential if progress by researchers is to be sustained.

FINDING JOURNAL ARTICLES

When you search on a topic using Library Search you should find a list of journal articles matching your keywords.

If the full-text of the article is available electronically this will be stated in the article record. You can connect from here to the journal containing the article by using the 'Electronic resource' link in the record.

If we don't have a subscription to the journal you may be able to request a copy from your school or college library.

HOW ARE JOURNAL ARTICLES ORGANISED?

When you find an interesting article title it may also have an abstract, a short paragraph explaining what the article is about. It is useful to read this first as you can usually tell from the abstract whether the article is going to be useful or not.

The main body of the article will include any results, the full discussion and evaluation and a list of references to books and articles the author has used. These references can be useful sources for you to follow up for more information.

REFINING YOUR SEARCH

If you find too many results:

- Try to add additional keywords to make your search more specific
- Apply limits to the search such as publication date, language, type of document

If you find too few results:

- Try to use alternative keywords and synonyms to broaden the search
- Think about alternative spellings, particularly American variations eg such as behaviour/ behavior, paediatrics/ pediatrics
- Remove any limits that are set on the search
- Try another information source!

ORGANISING YOUR PROJECT

Once you have gathered together a reasonable number of information sources (books, journal articles, websites etc) you can begin to organise your research to produce your own course work, project or assignment.

Your school or college tutors will be able to give you detailed advice about how to structure your work but generally there should be some or all of the following -

- an abstract
- an introduction
- a review of previous research with a critical evaluation of sources
- a discussion of different points of view including your own opinion, logically argued
- a section giving results if appropriate, with an evaluation of them
- a conclusion

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

At the end of your assignment you will be expected to produce a list of references (or bibliography). This is a list of all the resources you have used to produce your own work.

Make sure you keep a record of everything you have used when doing your research, including page references for any quotations, facts and figures you are citing to support your arguments.

Reference lists are usually arranged in alphabetical order by the author or editor's last name although your tutors should tell you exactly how they would like references arranged.

There is a link on the library's website giving advice on how to cite references –

www.library.manchester.ac.uk/academicsupport/referencing

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is using someone else's work and pretending that is your own. It is a very serious offence in the academic world and if detected in a university student's work they would receive no marks for that assignment and probably other sanctions. You can quote from other people's work but you must make it clear in the text by putting inverted commas round the quoted piece, saying who wrote it and then including that reference in your bibliography. Even paraphrasing (not using exactly the same words) can be considered as plagiarism if you don't acknowledge that it comes from someone else's work.

SOME USEFUL TIPS...

Start your research early. It's important to leave yourself enough time to find (and read!) everything you need, write up your report and compile your reference list.

Make sure you record your references accurately. If you have a photocopy of a journal article make sure you have a record of the title of the journal, year, volume and page numbers to include in your bibliography. Photocopies of chapters in books can be particularly tricky to trace if you have not recorded the title and author of the book the chapter appeared in.

Don't only rely on one source of information. Look at several and decide on your own opinion as you may disagree with some sources. Just because something appears on the web, in a book, journal or newspaper article it may not necessarily be true, accurate or unbiased. It is always worth considering why a writer might take a particular point of view.

Use all the help you can. Your tutors, teachers and librarians at school or college are excellent sources and can point you in the direction of useful information. Make use of the university library, its resources are huge and staff here will be happy to help you.

Library website – www.manchester.ac.uk/library