

Name: _____

Teacher: _____

Using the Library for Research

This tutorial is designed to introduce students to general research methods and library resources. These skills of knowing how to locate, evaluate, and use information are part of **Information Literacy** and are an important part of your studies as a college student and information use in life in general. What exactly is Information Literacy? It is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information—in school and in everyday life. In a time of mass amounts of information due to the Internet Information Literacy is an increasingly critical skill.

Note: At the end of each part there will be a short set of exercises for you to complete.

Note: The appendix includes a quick guide to different information resources and a glossary to help you with important words which are **bolded** throughout the tutorial. You can keep these for future reference.

I. Encyclopedias: Finding a Topic

Choosing a Topic

If you have not been assigned a topic by your teacher here are some suggestions that will help you choose a research topic:

- Pick a topic that will be of interest to you
- Talk with your instructor
- Look for ideas in your class textbook or magazines, journals, and books

You might also consider **Reference Books** and **Subject Directories**:

Reference Books

Reference books, such as encyclopedias, provide brief information on a subject. They make a good starting point for subjects that might be new to you. For example, if you are to write about the Gilded Age but are new to the topic, a reference book will explain the origin of the term, give important dates, and introduce important people involved—all in a quick, concise read.

Reference books offer benefits (+) and drawbacks (-):

- + Provide statistical, demographic, biographical, and short book-article information
- + Researchers do not need to read entire books when using reference books
- Reference books cannot be taken out of the library
- Reference books do not go into detail on a subject

Subject Directories

Subject Directories are web pages organized by topic and sub-topics put together by knowledgeable people. The sites you find through Subject Directories are usually not academic and thus not usually appropriate for inclusion in an academic paper, but they offer introductions and background information on a topic that might be new to you. Useful features include:

- + Are more organized than Search Engine (e.g., Google) results
- + Are of more value than many Search Engine results since people compile Subject Directory websites based on their quality whereas Search Engine results are created automatically by computers
- + Many sites give introductory overviews of specific subjects, such as U.S. history

Research Questions

As you consider research topics and explore resources such as Reference Books and Subject Directories you should start to form a **research question**. A research question poses a question, theory, or problem you plan to answer or address in paper. Research questions should be concise but address specific interests with carefully considered words. For example if you are interested in World War II some research questions might include:

- What were the causes of World War II?
- What were the decisive battles of World War II?
- Who were the major political leaders of important nations during World War II?
- What were the results and effects of World War II?

Exercises

1) Mark an X for all of the following that are likely Reference Books:

(examples) *Handbook of Tennessee Law* X , *Shakespeare: Plays* _____

- *Encyclopedia of Social Work* _____
- *A Biography of George Washington* _____
- *Encyclopedia Britannica* _____
- *The History of China* _____
- *Collected Stories of Edgar Allan Poe* _____
- *Atlas of South America* _____
- *South American Political Development* _____

2) Go to the library homepage (<http://library.jsc.edu>) and find the *Subject Directories* page under “Resources”. Open **Librarians’ Internet Index** and find the categories for the following sections:

(example) Business → Finance

- _____ → Crime
- _____ → Holidays
- _____ → Sports → _____ → Major Leagues

3) Mark an X (only one) for the best research question for a topic on smoking:

- _____ Who smokes? Why?
- _____ What are the demographics of smokers and who are the most at-risk groups?
- _____ When was the last time I smoked?

II. Books in Print and Online: Information Seeking Strategies

Print Books

Once you have selected a research topic you need to start thinking about how to search for information. You will search primarily with **keywords**, important word found in the title or introduction of a resource such as book. A good place to start looking for keywords is in the research question discussed earlier. For example, if your research question was “What were the causes of World War II?” good keywords would include:

- causes
- World War II

The other words in the question such as question words (“what”), verbs (“were”), articles (“the”), and prepositions (“of”) are *not* important and should *not* be used as keywords.

You use these keywords when you search the **online catalog** (the library search resource for finding books) to find books on your topic.

Books have advantages (+) and disadvantages (-) for research:

- + Provide in-depth, detailed coverage of topics
- + Offer historical insight and viewpoints
- + Often have bibliographies and notes that refer to other useful resources
- Are longer than other resources and take more time to read—a problem if time is limited
- Do not contain the most up-to-date information as they take longer to produce

Online Books

As with other forms of information, books can increasingly be found online. Called online books, electronic books, or e-books, there are complete books available entirely online. Print books and online books have advantages (+) and disadvantages (-):

Print Books

- + Easier to read longer texts
- + Can take with you anywhere
- Require that you visit a library to access
- Checkout period is limited

Online Books

- + Can be accessed from home or anywhere a computer is connected to the Internet
- + Are easier to search using keywords and **full-text** searching
- Reading a computer screen can be uncomfortable over longer periods of time
- Require access to a computer and a connection to the Internet

Choosing which resource best meets your needs involves examining what resources your teacher requires, identifying potential sources of information, and selecting the appropriate resource for the research question at hand. That resource could be a print book, an online book, or some of the resources we will examine below. Just make sure that the resource selected meets needs and priorities set *before* choosing the resource.

Exercises

4) Write keywords for the following questions:

Was the New Deal an effective solution to the Great Depression? _____

Should the government offer school vouchers? _____

Does media violence contribute to society's violence? _____

5) Look at the following online catalog record for a library book and answer the questions:

1. Cole, Arthur Charles, 1886- . The irrepresible conflict, 1850-1865. New York, Macmillan, 1938.				
Publisher : St. Clair Shores, Mich., Scholarly Press [1971?, c1934]				
Location	Call Number	Volume	Material	Status
JSCC LIB--BOOK STACKS	E415.7 .C69 1971		BOOK	Available

What is the book's call number? _____

Is the book in the library right now? _____

How do you know? _____

6) Below is a catalog record for an online book (note "ONLINE" under "Material". How do you open the book?

1. Davis, Todd F., 1965- Kurt Vonnegut's crusade, or, How a postmodern harlequin preached a new kind of humanism [electronic resource] / Todd F. Davis.				
Electronic Access : Click here to read online via JSCC				
Publisher : Albany : State University of New York Press, c2006.				
Location	Call Number	Volume	Material	Status
JSCC ELECTRONIC RESOURCE	EBook		ONLINE	Available
Full Record : University of Memphis Libraries [PS3572.O5 Z65 2006eb]				

III. Periodicals: Finding Information

Periodicals are magazines, academic journals, and newspapers. The term comes from "periodic," or occurring at regular intervals, such as daily, weekly, and monthly. Periodicals typically contain a number of articles on a variety of topics by different writers.

Magazines & Academic Journals

Magazines (such as *Newsweek* and *People*) and academic **journals** (that you will read in college) both contain brief articles and are published on a regular basis. So what are the differences?

	Magazines	Academic Journals
Audience	General audience	Specialists
Tone	More casual	Serious
Vocabulary	Geared to all readers	More challenging
Graphics	More photos and images	More graphs and charts
Bibliographies	Rarely	Often
Peer-Review	No	Usually

Academic journals are written with specialists from a particular field in mind, so they are more challenging reads with jargon and graphs and charts that explain rather than illustrate. They almost always contain bibliographies, and either **footnotes** or **endnotes**, with references to related resources used or related. They are also typically **peer-reviewed**, which means that a panel of experts has reviewed the writing to evaluate its quality, accuracy, and pertinence. For a full understanding of an academic topic you will need to read peer-reviewed literature and often teachers will require peer-reviewed sources for a college paper.

Should a magazine or journal be chosen when doing research? As with book types, your selection depends on your needs and the requirements of the teacher.

Overall, consider the strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) of magazines and journals:

- + Articles are shorter than books and can read more quickly
- + Are published regularly and are fairly up-to-date—much more so than books
- + Can be often be found online in full-text—again, more often than books
- As they are shorter than books, articles do not provide in-depth information (many peer-review articles will assume you already have an in-depth grasp of a topic)
- Older articles are unlikely to be online
- Usually cannot be checked out

Newspapers

A periodical, like magazines and journals, the newspaper also comprises brief articles but has unique advantages (+) and disadvantages (-):

- + Very current information—typically published daily—they provide insight into issues as they happen
- + Strong source for regional and local information
- + Often found online in full-text
- While edited, newspapers are *not* scholarly
- Because information is published so quickly it is prone to errors
- Do not provide in-depth insight due to short articles and considerable background information for readers new to a topic (very different from peer-reviewed sources)

Locating information in periodicals requires the same careful consideration of keywords used in searching for books. Given that there are many more articles than books out there and the topics of articles is more specific you will need to refine your keywords over multiple searches through narrowing and broadening.

Narrowing Topics

Choosing a keyword like “history” is related to too many periodical articles and such a search will result in many thousands of articles—too many to read. Even a narrower topic like the “American revolution” will be too broad. In such cases you will need to narrow your topics by looking for a smaller part.

You can do this a number of ways. Which aspects of the topic interest you? What are important events or people involved? Does your instructor or a librarian have any suggestions? Once you

narrow a topic, say from the “American revolution” to the “Battle of Brooklyn,” choose keywords to make your research job much easier such as

- “American revolution”
- “George Washington”
- “Battle of Brooklyn”
- and “strategy”

Broadening Topics

You might start with a topic that is too narrow. There is likely not much written on “carousels found in Memphis parks and malls,” but perhaps there is on “carousels found in United States parks” or just “American carousels” that would be relevant to your interests.

Broadening a topic might involve expanding the time frame of your interests, the geographic area, or from one to a series of events. As with narrowing, you can approach your teacher or a librarian for help.

Exercises

7) Which is **not** a synonym for “peer-review”? (choose one)

Scholarly _____

Popular _____

Refereed _____

8) Which resource is best for each need? (circle one for each question)

Information about yesterday’s typhoon? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

A critique of a university research project? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

A detailed interview with a foreign leader? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

A lab study of the effects of pollution on rats? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

A brief profile of the local mayor? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

A cover story on illegal immigration? **Journal / Magazine / Newspaper**

9) *Narrow* the topic “pollution” and write down a few keywords:

Broaden the topic “holistic treatment of throat cancer in rural central Mexico” and write a few keywords:

IV. The Internet: Evaluating Sources

These days, many people rely on Internet resources such as search engines like Google to quickly find information. There are many benefits (+) to using the Internet:

- + Sometimes has the most current information of any source
- + Has a mix of statistics, facts, articles, and images
- + Can access anywhere and is often free

But for a college researcher the Internet is actually much more challenging to use than books and periodicals because the quality of information can vary so widely. Why?--because *anyone* can put information on the web. Also consider some drawbacks (-) to the Internet:

- Information may not be up-to-date and it is frequently hard to determine when something was published
- Much information on the Internet is not fact-checked or even edited for grammar and spelling
- Information on the Internet rarely goes through a review process (such as peer-review)
- Most information on the Internet is not organized for searching or browsing
- Not all information on the Internet is free
- Again: *anyone* can publish, and that means experts down to cranks

The value of the library is that it will help you with the negative aspects of the Internet and help you use it more effectively, but you will need to learn to evaluate information—not only what you find on the Internet but in any information resource—by yourself as well. We will consider four topics: accuracy, authority, bias, and currency...as easy as ABC. These topics are important not just for the Internet but also for any information source.

Accuracy

Is the information you are looking at correct? Verify information in trustworthy sources to ensure what you read, especially on the Internet which has many inaccurate websites, is accurate. Most people think they can use common sense to determine what is accurate, but do not rely on your gut—always double check. Remember, it used to be common sense that the sun revolved around the Earth. If you need help ask a librarian.

Authority

Should you trust that the person writing a piece knows what they are talking about? A writer for a peer-review journal with a list of citations has more measurable knowledge than a random posting on an Internet chat site. Examine the background of writers you are not familiar with to determine their authority, or trustworthiness. Again, if you are unsure talk to a librarian.

Bias

Does an author have a particular point-of-view that colors their writing? Be wary of opinion stated as fact, as frequently occurs on the Internet. Sometimes, as with newspaper editorials and opinion pieces, the bias is clearly stated and insight can be taken from that particular perspective. Think hard about why a writer is saying what they are. A librarian can help you here, too, if you are unsure.

Currency

Not money, but when was an information resource created. How current, or up-to-date, is it? If you are writing about Iran today, a book from the 70s will not be of much value. But if you are writing about the 1979 Iranian revolution that book might be useful. Be careful with websites, as date of the last update is likely not the same as when a piece was written. By now you can probably guess who to go to for help.

Exercises

10) Which is usually best for an academic paper for *accuracy*? Book _____ Internet _____

11) Which resource is best for *currency*? Newspaper _____ Book _____

12) www.hist.unt.edu links to a university website. How do you know from just the link?

Overall, how do you feel about such a site's authority?

V. Library Research Resources: Ethics and Style

Plagiarism

When writing it is unethical to claim to the writing or even ideas of others as your own—it is called **plagiarism**. In college, you can face considerable punishment up to expulsion if you are found to plagiarize.

For example, if the original source by a Mr. Smith is:

Even at a young age, he was not popular among the peers of the kingdom since he was immune to external influence and appeared to despise intrigue.

It would be plagiarizing if you used almost the same text and did not note the original author:

Even as a youth, he was unpopular in the kingdom since he was incapable of being influenced and hated intrigue.

You need to write the thought in your own words and credit the author:

As Smith has stated, because he resisted the pressures of those around him he was unpopular in the kingdom. Even while still a youth he exhibited a hatred of intrigue and demonstrated the incorruptibility that would put him at odds with others.

You can use the words and concepts of others as long as you credit them, but you will need to cite the authors.

Citations

Citations are notes, typically in a **bibliography** at the back of a paper, that reference information and ideas you have taken from the work of other writers. This information could be exact quotes or ideas that you put into your own words but are not your own. There are three main styles used at Jackson State:

- **MLA:** It is used typically in humanities classes.
- **APA:** This style is most often found in science classes.
- **Turabian:** This format is also known as the University of Chicago style.

A particular citation style needs to be followed exactly and is written differently depending on the source. With many more types of sources these days due to electronic information a librarian

can help you determine which way to cite a resource, but always be aware of what your teacher wants.

Exercises

13) A student changes a few words in a paragraph from a book while adding it to his paper. He thinks because the paragraph in his paper is *not exactly* the same it is **not** plagiarism. Is he correct? **Yes / No** (circle one)

Explain: _____

14) What do you think would happen if you got caught plagiarizing in class? (mark one)

Nothing _____ Slight decrease in grade _____ Kicked out of class _____

Why? _____

15) Below is a citation. Answer the questions that follow:

Jones, Tammy and Bill Kelly. "The Discovery of Animals: A Trip to New Guinea." Journal of Furry Animal Biology. 60.6 (1996): 78-85.

How many authors wrote the article? _____

What is the name of the periodical? _____

What is the name of the article? _____

On what pages of the journal would you find the article? _____

Conclusion

The concepts and resources covered in this tutorial can take some time to getting used to, so don't worry if everything was not perfectly clear in the limited space of this tutorial. Just remember that a librarian can help you with questions you still have or specific issues that arise in the future when you are doing research. Librarians are there for help, guidance, and instruction, so don't be shy asking for help! You can:

- Ask in person
- Call us at **(731) 425-2609** or **1 (800) 355-JSCC, ext. 572**
- Or email us at **jfetty@jscc.edu**