

Conducting Your Research

Frequently students who know how to do research—especially when they have done well on their high school papers—are shocked when they do not do well on a college paper. The problem is that the expectations of college level writing and high school level writing are different. As we advance in our educational development, the rules change and more is expected of us.

For example, I do not think it is inappropriate for high school teachers to accept citations to *World Book Encyclopedia*, *Wikipedia*, or other encyclopedias from their high school students. At the college level, there are ways to appropriately use encyclopedias. However, citing them in your paper is not one of them.

Another difference is that you generally have more resources available to you at the college level than you do in your high school classes. For example, most high schools do not have the financial resources to subscribe to electronic databases; an important research tool that colleges have.

In this section, I will briefly summarize the following research strategies.

- Academic Journals
- Books
- Internet
- Interviews
- Newspapers
- Lectures/Speeches/Presentations
- Government Publications
- Special Collections
- Wikipedia
- You Tube

More detailed explanations of these strategies as well as other explanatory links about them can be found at

<http://writing.stevenberg.info/research/step04.html>

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Research Strategies

Academic Journals

Articles from peer reviewed journals are considered to be the most credible publications. You should be sure to consult peer reviewed journals and cite articles published in them as part of your final paper.

Library databases can often be accessed from home. However, passwords are typically required.¹

Strategy for Success

Because they are so easy to use and because faculty members are so impressed when they see high quality research, I think it is foolish for students to not take the time to use the electronic databases their college provides.

Books

Most people believe that they must go to the library in order to find out what books are available in the library, but this is not the case. You can search the college library on-line as well as the libraries from many community libraries. Books can also be searched using the “Look Inside” feature developed by Amazon.com.

Internet

One of the great benefits of the Internet is that it is easy to access using Google or some other search engine. There are, however, three major disadvantages of relying on the Internet for your research. You also need to be aware that just because you find information on-line your source may not be credible—even if the information is true.²

Interviews

As you begin your research, consider individuals with whom you could discuss your project. Some of them might be members of the faculty or people in the community. You might also try to interview the authors or articles, books, or web sites you consulted. Or someone in your class might suggest a person they know who knows something about your topic.

¹ As part of class instruction, I provide the passwords for Schoolcraft College’s databases to my students. Unfortunately, because of licensing restrictions, I cannot legally publish these passwords as part of this workbook or in the on-line materials that accompany it.

² Credibility of sources is in another section of this workbook.



Newspapers

Newspapers can serve as a rich source of both historical and contemporary information. If you consult newspapers as part of your overall research strategy, you can add a unique flavor to your writing; a flavor that is certain to impress your instructor when used appropriately. A reference librarian can help you access the databases in the college library.

Lectures/Speeches/Presentations

Attending a lecture, speech, or presentation on your subject can be an enjoyable way to do research. You can check local events calendars in newspapers, community organizations, and area colleges and universities to see what might be available.

Government Publications

Government documents are a valuable source of statistical information or to locate the results of federally funded studies. Congressional reports and publications of various agencies are also useful. Some libraries are specially designated to house such documents. In the Internet age, many government publications are available on-line.

Special Collections

Many libraries house special collections of rare and/or unpublished materials that you can only access by traveling to the library. Often, special collections are in "closed stacks." This means that you are not given direct access to the materials. Instead, you tell the librarian what you desire and he or she gets it for you. Other restrictions might also apply to special collections: pencils only, no back packs, et cetera.



Many people do not realize that, in addition to being excellent at helping students with general advice, reference librarians also specialize in various subjects. For example, Professor Diane Nesbit at Schoolcraft College is responsible for the Government Publications.

When you visit your college library, ask if there is a librarian who specializes in your subject or on the types of materials you require.

Regardless of your topic, find out which librarian might have special training in your area of study.



Wikipedia

When used appropriately, Wikipedia—and other encyclopedias—can be an excellent starting point for your research. However, encyclopedias are only a starting point and cannot be considered appropriate academic sources to cite in your research paper.

YouTube

Among the videos of people acting stupid, you can also find many quality videos on YouTube; videos that might help you gain insights into your research. Search YouTube by key word and see what turns up.

Suggestion for Success

Why spend time doing research that someone has already done? When you do an Internet search, add “bibliography” or “weblibliography” as a search term with your subject appropriate search terms. However, don’t use both terms in the same search.

For example, if you were doing a paper on some aspect of health care such as substance abuse among college students, you might use the following terms for your Google search: “substance abuse’ weblibliography college” or “alcohol bibliography college student”.

Bibliographies and weblibliographies are lists of resources on a specific topic.

On-Line Resources

- Conduct Your Research
<http://writing.stevenberg.info/research/step04.html>
(This resource is the one you use to get more detailed information about the research strategies discussed in this section.)
- Compiling an Annotated Bibliography
<http://writing.stevenberg.info/tutorials/annotated-bibliography>
- Utilizing Schoolcraft College’s On-line Databases
(Even if you do not attend Schoolcraft College, this resource will give general strategies about using databases; strategies you can use with the databases found at your own college.)
<http://writing.stevenberg.info/tutorials/using-databases>

