

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH

(Substantially adapted from University of Minnesota Library Website:

<http://tutorial.lib.umn.edu>)

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1. OBJECTIVES

This guide serves to achieve the following;

- To guide students, step-by-step on how to conduct research systematically
- To help students know where relevant material can be located
- To guide students on different types of materials that can be used for academic research

To conduct proper research, one needs to realize that conducting research cannot be done in a haphazard manner. To organize or focus the search, the process needs to be keyword driven; what you retrieve from a search will be dependent upon the computations you put on the search field. Therefore;

- It is advisable to put your topic in question form first
- Then ask some basic questions
 - What is the main idea of my paper?
 - What specific ideas am I trying to describe or prove?
 - What academic discipline does my topic fit into?
 - What specific aspect of the topic do I wish to consider?
- Also try to answer the where, when who why and how of your topic

2. LOCATING PUBLISHED INFORMATION

A lot of information is published on every subject imaginable. To retrieve only what's relevant to the topic, you need to identify the type and source of information you collect. The following formats are what is acceptable in scholarly research and should form the basis of your research:

- Journals
- Books
- Newspapers
- Government publications
- Primary sources
- The Internet

- Quick reference Publications including Almanacs, Statistical collections, Biographical information, Directories of companies, organizations, and government agencies, Scientific data, Opinion poll data
- General reference publication

- **The following are some of the reference sites available online; some are free and some charge a fee for information**
 - www.encyclopedia.com – a free online encyclopaedia with a general coverage
 - <http://www.Britannica.com> – general coverage encyclopaedia
 - www.scholar.google.co.za – a search engine linked to the library's e-resources
 - www.sabinet.co.za – a search engine covering South African research papers
 - <http://journals.sabinet.co.za> - The SA ePublications service with the most comprehensive, searchable collection of full-text electronic South- and Southern African journals in the world (available through SABINET)
 - www.isiwebofknowledge.com – a useful citations website with linked full-text articles
 - www.emeraldinsight.com – a database dedicated to management research
 - www.sciencedirect.com – a comprehensive multidisciplinary database with strong emphasis on sciences
 - www.ebscohost.com – a multidisciplinary database
 - www.jstor.org – Social sciences coverage
 - <http://stardata.nrf.ac.za/star/ccrplogin.html> - Current and completed research including thesis and dissertations
 - <http://ajol.info> – African journals
 - www.saps.gov.za – crime statistics
 - www.hsrc.co.za – Human Sciences Research Council
 - www.csir.co.za – Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
 - www.gov.za – Government website, for government related information
 - www.statsonline.co.za – South African statistics
 - www.un.org – United Nations website

- www.unicef.org – United Nations Children’s Fund website
- www.merriam-websterdictionary.org – online dictionary
- www.wikipedia.org – free online encyclopaedia
- Library websites of other academic institutions, especially South African e.g www.up.ais.ac.za, resources located here are available through Inter Library Loans

3. TIPS FOR LOCATING RELEVANT WEB SITES

The following tips are offered as a guide to selecting a reputable and relevant website:

- **Visit the Univen Library Web site.** Here you will find all the resources available in the library to conduct a search for your assignment.
- **Use Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.co.za)** as your springboard: it will often link you to the databases that UNIVEN subscribes to.
- **Follow links from one reputable Web site to another.** One good Web site will often lead to many similar sites.
- **Visit the home page of a professional or research organization** that is doing work in an area that ties into your topic. They also tend to recommend sites they feel are reputable.
- **Look for references to Web sites in journal articles.** It's becoming common for authors to include Web sites in their bibliographies.
- **Join a listserv or mailing list about your topic.** Online discussion groups often share information about helpful resources.

4. INFORMATION SOURCES AND THEIR USAGE

Type of material	Uses for	Example
Encyclopaedia- general	Broad overview of a topic	Encyclopaedia Britannica
Encyclopaedia- subject	Focused background information on a subject	Encyclopaedia of psychology
Scholarly books	Broad overview of a topic; useful in writing long articles	Psychology: an introduction
Journal/Periodical articles	Current and detailed information on a topic	Longitudinal study of exporters and noexporter, by George Tesar and A.H. Moini
Quick reference sources	Facts and statistics	Business blue book
Conference proceedings	Books containing research papers presented at conferences by scholars	The twelve off campus Library Science conference proceedings
Theses and dissertations	Research projects of Masters and Phd students; UNIVEN can access other university T & D's	Analysis of environmental reporting in South Africa, by A. Muhanelwa (2008)
Indexes	Locate contents of journals	InfoTrac
Government publications	Brief information in pamphlet form or extensive reports	The Government Gazette
Newspaper articles	For short and current information on a particular topic	Sowetan, Mirror
Magazines & web sources	For short papers and speeches Background on a new topic	You, News24.com

5. SEARCH STRATEGIES

A number of strategies can be employed to conduct a search. Depending on the strategy you choose, you can either narrow down or expand your search. The following are the methods used to conduct a search;

1. Using Boolean Search Terms

Using a Boolean search allows you to define the relationships between keywords and phrases by using AND, OR and NOT to enlarge or narrow the search. For example:

Search for: HIV AND rural women

Result: all records containing both HIV and rural women

Search for: HIV OR rural women

Result: all records containing either HIV or rural women

Search for: HIV NOT rural women

Result: all records containing HIV but not rural women

Boolean search terms can also be used in combination with each other to construct complex searches. For example:

Search for: HIV OR treatment AND rural women NOT testing

Result: all records containing either HIV or treatment AND rural women - but not testing

2. Using Quotations (“ ”)

Putting quotation marks around search term narrows a search considerably. If you are interested in the impact of computers on writing instruction, for instance, you could search for the exact phrases, "computers and writing instruction" or "computer-assisted writing instruction."

3. Using Wild Card Symbols

Wild card symbols can be used to expand a search in cases where one is not sure of spellings.

(*) – expands search by entering only root of a word - Entering writ* into the search field will allow writ, write, writes, writer and written, as well as writing to be returned in your search results, whereas entering writing will result only in returning all records that include the word writing.

(?) – helpful in retrieving possible spellings of word in a keyword - is useful for including possible spellings of a word in a keyword search. For example:

Entering "S?weitzer" into the search field when unsure of the spelling of Albert Schweitzer's last name, will return records with both "Schweitzer" and "Sweitzer" in the search results. As it turns out, both are common spellings of the great humanitarian's name.

(%) – use to match any string of 0 or more characters - J%son – matches; Jason, Jackson and Johnson.

4. Using Specific Publication Information

Bibliographic details of a book can be combined with search phrases to narrow down a search when using a keyword search. Details that can be entered are titles, authors and publication dates.

6. KEEPING RECORDS OF YOUR SEARCHES

Every scholarly paper/report should have a list of sources or bibliography at the end. This list shows which sources were used and serves to acknowledge the authors for their ideas and also has to be accessible to other researchers who might want to verify or find the articles and read them for themselves. The following list must therefore be well-maintained throughout the research;

- Databases you've searched
- Keyword strategies you've used
- Books, articles, and Web sites you've found

The above will save you time in case you need to go back to an article for further clarity and when you compile your bibliography.

7. SCHOLARLY VERSUS POPULAR JOURNALS

There are some distinguishing characteristics that can help you identify whether a journal is scholarly or popular.

Type of journal	Distinguishing characteristics
<p>Scholarly (also known as academic; or loosely peer-reviewed, refereed)</p>	<p>Author: scholar in the field/someone who has done research in the field Language: that of the discipline covered envisages that the reader has some technical background Purpose: reports original research/experiment to disseminate information to other scholars Publisher: usually a professional organization (not exclusive) Other characteristics: abstract, summary of contents before the main article, often contain graphs and charts, lists affiliations of the author/s, bibliography at the end of the article</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <p><i>Examples of scholarly journals</i> (source: http://tutorial.lib.umn.edu)</p>
<p>Popular Magazine</p>	<p>Author: sometimes anonymous, staff reporter, in-house journalist Language: simple, easily accessible vocabulary Purpose: entertainment, promote a viewpoint, sell products Publisher: in-house Other characteristics: usually glossy, full of pictures, articles usually short, no bibliography at the end</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <p><i>Examples of popular magazines</i> (source: http://www.time.com; www.you.co.za)</p>

For undergraduate research, usually both types (scholarly and popular) can be used for research.

8. EVALUATING JOURNAL ARTICLES

In order to determine whether what you retrieved is relevant to your search here is a checklist: (substantially reproduced from <http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/evaljrl2.html>)

- **Purpose:** Why was the article written: to inform, to present opinions, to report research or to sell a product? For what audience is it intended?
- **Authority:** What are the author's credentials? Are qualifications, experience, and/or institutional affiliation given? Is the publisher and the author reputable?
- **Accuracy:** Is the information correct and free from errors?
- **Timeliness/Currency:** Is the information current enough or does it provide the proper historical context for your research needs? Know the time needs of your topic and examine the timeliness of the article; is it: up-to-date, out-of-date, or timeless?
- **Coverage:** Does the article cover the topic in depth, partially or is it a broad overview? Does the information substantiate
- **Objectivity:** Does the information show bias or does it present multiple viewpoints? Does the information appear to be well-researched?
- **Illustrations:** Are charts, graphs, maps, photographs, etc. used to illustrate concepts? Are the illustrations relevant? Are they clear and professional-looking?
- **Bibliography:** Scholarly works always contain a bibliography of the resources that were consulted. The references in this list should be in sufficient quantity and be appropriate for the content.

SOURCES

<http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/evaljrl2.html>

<http://tutorial.lib.umn.edu>

<http://www.time.com>

<http://www.you.co.za>

For more information contact any librarian in the library.

TAKE A QUIZ

Indicate with a True (T) or False (F) your responses to the following;

Scholarly articles are authored by someone who has done research in the field

T		F	
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A good article will show bias and present a single viewpoint

T		F	
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Keeping records of your searches is not helpful in compiling a bibliography

T		F	
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Using Boolean operators helps you define the relationship between keywords

T		F	
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End of Tutorial!!