



Getting Started Doing College Research

http://library.lsc.edu/04_GetHelp/documents/GettingStarted.pdf

Good research for college papers and presentations requires that you find information and then critically evaluate the information: Is it the right type of information? Is it current enough? Is it reliable or authoritative? Is it biased? Using articles and other information from published resources available from the library assures that many of these questions are addressed for you. When getting started doing research you may need to use both the free Web and library resources in both print and online databases. Consider the following points:

Web Resources	or	Library Resources
Anyone can publish anything on the Web so Web information in has no official review or editing process. Evaluating Web information for its currency, authority, relevance and bias is a lot of work, and often not even possible with missing source information about the Web page: the author, date of publication, source of the data presented, etc.		Information in published library resources (books, newspapers, magazines, and journals) goes through several reviews: the publishing process and reviews by peers in the discipline; selection of a magazine or journal for inclusion in a database; selection for inclusion in the library's collection. Librarians and instructors play a role in the selection process based on what is needed for students.
Many Web sites are only teasers to get you to purchase the information presented. A lot of looking and evaluating is required to find authoritative information on a topic.		Library resources are purchased especially for students attending the college based upon programs taught there, so they will have access to quality information for their assignments.
Information on the Web is not organized. Search engines look for keywords on the Web pages as requested. Google Books and Google Scholar and other such projects are a good start in this effort.		Library resources are organized by their subjects in catalogs and databases, and by types of information, so that finding what users need is easier, once the organization scheme is understood.
Web coverage of a subject is not always comprehensive.		Librarians try to purchase materials in all subject areas they know their users need.
Web information can be here today and gone tomorrow. The Web is constantly changing. A new system for labeling information is a good start in solving this problem: called DOI, for digital object identifier, Web resources with a DOI are permanently findable on the Web.		Library resources are kept until no longer useful. They can be loaned out but they usually return after a brief time. Online library resources are there for all users to access 24/7 once the user provides their userID and password.
The Web is "do it yourself" and the finding tools, the search engines, are only partially successful.		Library staff are available to assist in finding the best information in the most efficient way. They are also familiar with most LSC-O assignments.

What type of information is required? For example, do you need... ?

Magazines, journals, newspapers?

Magazines, newspapers, newsletters, or journals published on a regular basis (periodically) are called periodicals. They come in many forms and cover all topics. Use an index database to locate articles. The library provides many databases depending upon your subject. Look for the list of databases available for your academic subject in the list of library databases.

Most current information?

Assignments in the sciences or applied sciences (such as Biology or Nursing) usually require the most current information. Most databases bring articles in most current first order. They also provide boxes to ask for certain dates. If you need current events use a newspaper or current events database or a news Web site.

Primary sources?

Assignments in Literature, Philosophy, History, and the Social Sciences sometimes require original literary works or information from an historical time such as old newspapers or magazines, diaries and letters. We have books, databases and other resources providing these things. There are also a lot of primary sources on the Web.

Scholarly journals?

Assignments in all disciplines will require you to identify journal articles, usually articles reporting research on some topic, or articles that give an in-depth explanation of a topic for professionals in that discipline. Many databases provide ways to limit to results to peer-reviewed scholarly journals. You will see a check box labeled scholarly "peer reviewed" journals. Some databases are all scholarly journals.

Full-length books, encyclopedias, almanacs?

Publications with in-depth treatment on a topic (books) or reference books such as subject encyclopedias give a broad overview or background on a topic. Use our catalog to locate what we have on a topic. Keyword searches help to locate exact subject headings on a particular topic and types of material. There are several databases available that provide e-books as full-length books, encyclopedias and dictionaries.

Date isn't that important?

Assignments in the humanities, the arts, philosophy or history may not need to be very current, although scholars are constantly revising their research in any field. Many databases cover the last 15-20 years of scholarly publications, and bring articles in chronological order by most recent first. But the best article on a topic in the humanities may have been written decades ago.

Secondary sources?

Books and articles might incorporate primary sources into a discussion or interpretation of literature or history. These are called secondary sources, i.e. literary criticism of a novel or short story or articles about a particular event or document from history, interpretations and discussions of the primary source. Much of this type of information is in scholarly journals.

Popular magazines and newspapers?

Some databases, such as Academic Search Complete and ProQuest Research Library, have both popular magazines and scholarly publications. Newspapers are usually in their own separate databases. Students need to learn how to select the best database to begin research based upon their needs. Instructors usually specify the type of information needed, but if you need guidance, ask for help at the library help desk on 2nd floor.