

Skills for Learning

Guide to Researching Your Dissertation

When beginning your research, ask yourself: *'how does this text relate to my research question?'* and *'will it help me fulfil my research aims?'* Try to read primary sources of information where you can as they provide you with original data and information on a topic.

Thinking about a search strategy before you begin your research will make the process more efficient and effective. It might be useful to follow this process:

1. Write down your research question and pick out the keywords. Also think about synonyms (words with similar meanings) e.g. childhood obesity/ paediatric obesity.
2. Try attaching AND/OR/NOT to keywords. OR makes your search broader, AND and NOT make it narrower. For example, obesity AND children would narrow your search by selecting items that contain both terms. Childhood obesity OR paediatric obesity would widen your search by selecting items that contain either or both terms. Teenagers NOT children would eliminate the term children from your search results.
3. Try truncation. Adding a * to words or part of words picks up alternative spellings and plurals. For example: librar* will find all words starting with that particular set of letters e.g. library, librarians, libraries or Organi*ation will find organisation and organization.
4. Think about any limits you might want to place on your search. For example, does the date of the information matter or do you only want information from journals?

If you are struggling to find relevant literature on your topic, it could be that the topic is too recent and so research in that area has not yet been published, not enough research has been produced in your topic area or that your topic is too broad or vague. If your topic is too broad or vague then you may need to work on your question until it is more focused which will make the searching process easier.

Remember to keep an accurate record of all the sources you would like to use in your work. Using bibliographic management software such as RefWorks is an easy way to do this. Our [Guide to RefWorks](#) takes you through the process of setting up a RefWorks account. There is also a **Referencing with RefWorks** workshop.

Sources of Information

The best place to start looking for information is through our online catalogue called [LibrarySearch](#) and the [subject databases](#). If you find useful texts that are not available at the library either electronically or in print, it may be possible to obtain items via an [inter-library loan](#).

There are other places to find information such as:

- **Reading lists** provided in your modules which can usually be found via Canvas.
- The **university library** or other **academic libraries**. You can apply for a Sconul Card which will enable you to visit other academic libraries which are members of the Sconul scheme. For more information, go to: <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sconul-access>
- Speak to members of **university staff** who are experts within your field of interest.
- **Relevant journals** in your subject area and browse through recent and past publications – you can browse our subscriptions by going to [Browzine](#).
- **ETHOS** is a database from the British Library offering full-text access to PhD theses from many British universities. You will need to register with the site to view content. To find out more information visit <http://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do>

Evaluating Information

Always evaluate any information you want to use in your dissertation. Look for research that is credible such as research published in peer-reviewed journals or authored by renowned experts in your field. The Internet can be a useful tool to find information but always check that websites you use are accurate, reliable and valid as many websites go through no formal publishing process. For further information on this topic, see our [Guide to Evaluating Information](#).



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