

Literature Search

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LITERATURE SEARCH

A literature search is a systematic, thorough search of all types of published literature to identify a breadth of good quality references relevant to a specific topic, and is a fundamental element of the methodology of any research project. The success of a research project is dependent on a thorough review of the academic literature at the outset - getting the literature search right will save hours of time in the long run. Effective literature searching is a critical skill in its own right and will prove valuable for any future information gathering activity whether within or outside of academia.

In practice, books and journals are the main source of information for most in-depth literature searches related to an extended essay, dissertation or research project. However, depending on your topic, many other sources will prove equally valuable such as newspaper archives, images, primary data and conference proceedings.

There are several aims of this kind of search:

- To review existing critical opinions or theories
- To identify current research findings
- TO identify potential research methods or models
- to enable comparison with your own research findings

Literature Search and Database Services

Need For Literature Search

While the scientific and technical literature has been growing exponentially, the amount of time that any user has for reading this literature remains more or less the same. Clearly, no research worker, unlike his predecessors who knew everything worthwhile in their field of specialization, is able to keep abreast of the latest developments in his field of specialization. To keep abreast of such developments he often needs the help of information specialists. These developments, the knowledge of which is so essential, get recorded in the literature devoted to the respective subject disciplines. The vastness of this literature and the lack of time for the user to look it up create a gap between him and the information he may find useful, Literature search is the means to bridge this gap. Thus, the main function of an information service facility is to bring together the user and the information he needs.

Steps in Literature Search

There are many points to consider in making an effective literature search. The first and foremost step is to ascertain the purpose, scope, depth and precise field of enquiry. This may entail a dialogue between the user and the information specialist. A quick assessment of the nature and extent of the enquiry will show whether the search is for specific factual information, mainly required by a technical worker, or for a few select references, normally adequate for an administrator or a policy maker, or for a comprehensive bibliographic search, which is usually the requirement of a research worker. Once the parameters of a query are fully understood, a proper search strategy should be chalked out. Haphazard searching of literature will lead not only to wastage of time and money, but also to the risk of missing a number of important documents. Much of the expertise in literature searching lies in choosing the most appropriate sources to consult with in each case and the order in which to consult them.

Selection of Sources

A good approach to literature search is looking up a bibliography, an encyclopedia or a review publication. This provides background information as also some useful references. After this preliminary search is over, searches should be carried out with secondary publications like abstracting and indexing services. Depending upon the topic, any one of the following situations may arise

- i) Secondary periodicals are available on the subject.
- ii) Secondary periodicals are available on the subject as well as on the broader area encompassing it.
- iii) No secondary periodical is available on the subject, but available on the broader area.
- iv) No secondary periodical is available on the subject, or on the broader subject.

Search in Secondary Sources

When secondary periodicals are available on the subject as well as on the broader subject,

The search must first begin with the secondary periodical on the subject proper, supplemented by references collected from the periodicals covering the broader subject. Usually, the secondary periodicals covering broader subjects would cover peripheral journals and sometimes quite alien to the main subject of search. But it is a well-known fact that there is a considerable scatter of information on a given topic over a whole range of periodicals covering core, peripheral and alien fields. Although a few core journals cover a considerable part (50-60%) of the published literature on a given topic, yet sizeable portion (30-40% or more) can be covered by scanning a large number of peripheral journals in alien fields (e.g., an article of medical interest, say malaria eradication, may be published in a sociology journal).

Skills are to be developed for the consultation of secondary periodicals, since a wide variation is observed in the arrangement of the entries as well as in the methods of indexing, and also the types of indexes provided. Usually, the indexing method used is explained in the introduction to the index. Pertinent subject headings vary from one secondary periodical to another. The searcher should acquaint himself not only with the scientific nomenclature and terminology, but also with the popular and trade names.

Search in Other Sources

No search will be complete without a look at other sources of information, specially for topics for which there are no secondary periodicals available. Such other sources are conference proceedings, research reports, theses, patents, standards and specifications, trade literature and in some cases monographs and treatises. There may be cases where information will be available from non-documentary sources like institutions and experts.

Whatever may be the type of information, sources may be needed to consult at sometime or the other. So, some knowledge of the main characteristics of different sources is needed. As mentioned earlier, much of the expertise in searching for information lies in choosing the appropriate sources to consult in each case and the order in which to consult them.

Recording Of References or Information

Every literature searcher develops his own style of taking notes of references. While every effort should be made to optimize the time and efficiency of search, it is good to remember that a few extra seconds spent to make proper preliminary records may save many frustrating hours later. The first principle in saving

search time is to use a single operation to serve multiple purposes. For example., references recorded on sheets of paper can serve only one purpose - providing a list of references without any order. But records on cards or slips, with one reference per card or slip, can serve several purposes. Abstracts can be added under each reference, if required, and the cards can be arranged by subject, author or chronologically, as may be required.

Presentation of Results

Proper presentation of search results requires as much skill and care as in defining the subject and parameters of search. Reading lists need only be selective and may require brief . But a search on behalf of a researcher will need exhaustive treatment, and may need slanted abstracts conforming to the user's need. The choice of arrangement also depends on what the user needs - alphabetical (by author's surname), chronological, source-wise (monographs, periodicals), non-conventional (microfilms, audio visuals, etc.), classified, or some other arrangement. The best arrangement is that which the user finds most helpful. An indication should be given as to how complete the bibliography is. The sources should be stated giving the exact references.

Skills in Literature Search

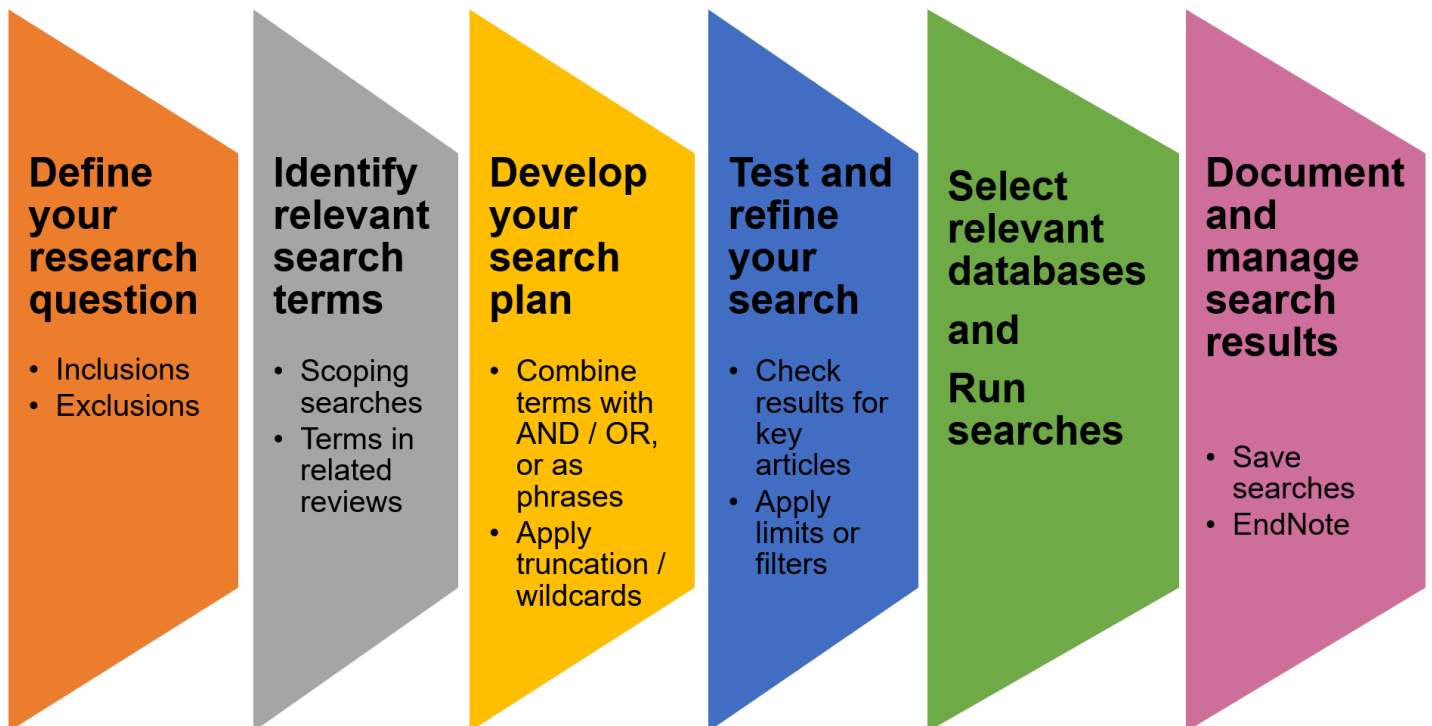
Expertise in literature search can be gained only by experience. Some attitudes or traits conducive to a good literature search are: imagination, mental flexibility, thoroughness and orderliness, persistence, judgment in resolving contradictory information and accuracy in recording. A basic knowledge of the search is considered helpful though not absolutely essential.

To conduct a literature search manually, start by defining your research question. Then, explore library catalogs, academic journals, and books relevant to your topic. Utilize databases like PubMed, JSTOR, or Google Scholar for electronic searches. Finally, complement your search with internet resources such as reputable websites, blogs, and online publications to gather a comprehensive range of information.

Figure 1.

Major Steps in Literature Search Represented in the Figure 1

Process



Literature search

Manual

Books, newspapers, journals, encyclopedias etc....

Databases

Google scholar

Inflibnet

STOR (digital library founded in 1995 in New York City-journal storage)

Science direct.

Reference style

There are a set of rules on how to cite sources in academic writing.

Preferred by particular academic disciplines because they work better with the kind of texts that are most commonly used in that discipline

Different styles of referencing: APA, MLA, Oxford, Harvard, Chicago

APA style referencing

Standardized by the American Psychological Association.

Uses the author/date method of citation in which the author's last name and the year of publication are inserted in the text of the paper.

Use only the surname of the author followed by a comma and the year of publication.

References must be listed in an alphabetical order by author, and then chronologically.

MLA (modern language Association)

Developed by modern language Association

Used in discipline in Humanities.

Uses the author-page number style for in text citation

Consists of two parts: a brief in-text citation in the body of the essay and a detailed list of the "works cited".

Oxford style referencing

A superscript (raised) number in the body of the text that refers to a footnote at the bottom of the page.

Footnotes provide the bibliographic details of a source and are numbered consecutively throughout a paper or chapter.

Do not use Latin abbreviations such as *ibid.* and *op.cit.* in Oxford style.

Table 1

Advantage and disadvantage

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Accessibility, • Deeper understanding of your chosen topic • Identifying experts and current research within that area, and answering key questions about current research	• not providing new information on the subject • Depending on the subject area, you may have to include information that is out of date.

