Library Research Guide

Fall 2025

GETTING STARTED

Because reference works provide (1) short answers to factual questions and/or (2) brief overviews of topics, they're often a good place to start many research projects. Examples of types of reference sources include dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, and directories. Mickel Library owns many good electronic reference databases, among the most useful of which are:

- *Oxford Reference*
    - over 400 subject-specific encyclopedias published by Oxford University Press
- *Credo Reference*
    - over 1k reference resources from over 100 publishers
- *Britannica Academic*
    - a general encyclopedia designed for college students

Reference Area: Another useful technique for finding overview-type resources is by physically browsing the library's Reference Area (on the 2nd floor of the library) in the appropriate call number area(s).

- Mickel Library's Reference Area is organized by the Dewey Decimal System (guides are posted on the ends of the shelves there).
    - If you have any questions about a good place to look, feel free to ask one of the librarians.

The "Open Internet": This is the free and unregulated Internet. Websites on the Internet often function as the equivalent of reference sources in that they provide short answers to specific questions or brief overviews of topics.

- Evaluating a website: Because the content of the Internet isn't necessarily edited for quality by any agency, researchers need to carefully evaluate these sources of information before accepting them as authoritative. To establish a website's credibility, look for the following:
    - author's credentials
    - the site's sponsor or "owner"
    - "last updated" date (some credible sites may or may not contain this information)
- Google

- probably the best, and certainly the best-known, Internet search engine.
- some of the "general tips" (below) work in Google (e.g., bound phrase searching), but some do not (truncation)
- try to use at least three or four (or more if you can think of them) search terms**.**
- NOTE*:* Google assumes an "and" between search terms, so you don't need to include it.

FINDING BOOKS
- A "catalog" is a database made up of records of a **particular library's** books, CDs, DVDs, VHS tapes, periodical titles, etc. To find items in Converse's Mickel Library, both print and electronic, go to our [Discovery Service](), type your terms in the search box, and select "Converse Catalog"; to find borrow-able books in South Carolina college/university libraries, go to our [Discovery Service](), type your terms in the search box, and select "PASCAL Delivers":
  - technolog* and communicat*
    - finds both words (and their variant endings), not just one or the other
  - single and (gender or sex) and (education or schools)
    - finds either "gender" or "sex," as well as either "education" or "schools," and then "single"
      - Note: the Discovery Service defaults to a broad keyword search, but the "Advanced Search" option provides more precise ways of finding materials, such as restricting your search to certain sections of a catalog record (e.g., titles subjects, authors/creators).

- To find (and borrow) print books beyond South Carolina libraries, use the world's largest "union catalog" (a catalog that lists the holdings of **multiple** libraries):
  - [WorldCat]() – lists millions of books held by college/university and public libraries across the U.S. as well as major international libraries.

- To find additional ebooks, use the library's Discovery Service and select as your search scope the option for "Articles, Books, and More." Then limit your search to "Books" as the "Resource Type" (note: in addition to ebooks, you'll also retrieve print books held in Converse's library.)

FINDING PERIODICAL ARTICLES

Periodicals: publications that are published "periodically" and regularly (e.g. annually, quarterly, daily) and are often designated **volume and/or issue numbers**, the latter of which often appear in parentheses beside the volume number [e.g., *Journal of Abnormal Psychology,* Vol 120(4)]; can be subdivided into several categories:

- Magazines (e.g., *Time, National Geographic, People, Sports Illustrated, Scientific American)* – information/entertainment for the general public; especially useful for information on current political and social issues.
- Newspapers (e.g., *New York Times, Spartanburg Herald Journal)* – information/entertainment for the general public; also useful for information on current political and social issues, especially **local-interest issues.**
- Scholarly journals (e.g., *New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of Modern Literature, Social Psychology Quarterly*) – contain articles written by academic specialists; convey specialized, in-depth knowledge to other academic specialists (i.e., professors, graduate students, and, in some cases, undergraduate students)

Periodical Databases (note: these are often simply called "databases" even though this designation is not technically correct): To find references to periodical articles, you'll need to use some sort of periodical "index" or "database." In many cases, these databases will provide **not only references** to articles, but also **"abstracts"** (summaries) of the articles and/or the **complete text and images** as well.

- General/Multidisciplinary Periodical Databases – Use these to find a good sampling of magazine, newspaper, and scholarly journal articles
    - *Academic Search Complete* – one of the world's largest multi-disciplinary databases. Provides indexing to over 12k periodicals (mostly scholarly journals and magazines) and also includes the full text of over 8k of these periodicals.
        - Sample search:
        - Topic: What sort of impact has the recycling of computers had on the environment?
            - o Possible search statements:
                - recycl* and computers and environment*
                - recycl* and computers

    - *Readers' Guide Full Text Mega* – covers 450+ periodicals (mostly popular magazines) dating back to the early 1980s; includes the full text of 250+ of these periodicals.

Locating Articles - To find complete articles for which you've found only a citation or abstract, you'll first want to click the "Periodicals by Title" link on the library's home page (in the "Research" section, within the "Discovery Service" category). Key in the first few or all of the words in the journal's title (NOT the title of the article itself), and you'll

see a listing of periodicals the library owns in electronic format as well as those it owns in print/physical format. For those in electronic format, their records will provide links to the database(s) that include(s) them. Occasionally these records will be incorrect or confusing; if you have any trouble determining whether the library has access to a particular journal article, please contact us through the "Ask a Librarian" service.

FINDING "ARTICLES, BOOKS, AND MORE"
Go to the library's Discovery Service, type in your search terms, and select "Articles, Books, and More" from the drop-down menu to retrieve literally BILLIONS of journal articles, books, book chapters (etc., etc.) from thousands of individual databases.

CITING YOUR SOURCES
Students are often confused and intimidated by the process of citing the sources they use in a paper or other academic project. By bearing in mind the *purpose* of citations, you can save yourself a lot of worry; and this purpose is simply to

1. give proper credit to the creator of an idea you've used, whether you've quoted this idea exactly or merely paraphrased it
   AND
2. allow your "audience" (whoever reads or observes your work) to trace this idea back to the source you got it from so that they can learn more about it.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no single correct way to cite your sources. Different academic disciplines *tend* to prefer certain methods, but there are several widely accepted methods within the academic world (the "correct" one is ultimately the one your professor asks you to use):

a. MLA style (often preferred in the humanities)
b. APA style (often preferred in the social sciences)
c. Turabian style (often preferred in music)
d. CSE style (often preferred in the biological sciences)
e. ACS style (often preferred in chemistry)

While there are web sites that purport to explain these styles, such as the well-known OWL (Online Writing Lab) at Purdue University, you might be safest in going directly to their respective manuals:

- *MLA Handbook (*8th ed., 2016), Reference Area 808.02 G35m 2016.
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed., 2010), Reference Area 808.066 P96 2010.
- Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (7th ed., 2007), Reference Area 808.02 T84m 2007.

- *Scientific Style and Format: the CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers* (8th ed., 2014), Reference Area 808.066 Sci27c 2014)
- *ACS Style: Effective Communication of Scientific Information* (3rd ed., 2006), Reference Area 808.06654 Ac78 2006) or "[References" (chapter 14)](#) from this publication

GENERAL TIPS FOR SEARCHING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES
(NOTE: The following techniques usually work with online library catalogs/OPACs, periodical databases, reference databases, search engines, and other standard library resources):
- To search for phrases, enclose them within double quotation marks. Otherwise, many databases will retrieve records in which all the words appear, but **not necessarily together or in the same order**.
  - "social media"
- To search for multiple endings of words, use an asterisk in place of the variant endings. This technique is known as truncation.
  - paint* (retrieves "painting," "paintings," "painter," "painters," etc.)
  - educat* (retrieves "educate," "educated," "education," "educational," etc.)
- To find all terms, use the "and" command. This command narrows your search.
  - "social media" and marketing
  - NOTE: Certain resources (e.g., Google products) *assume* an "and" between multiple search terms, so you don't need to include it in those instances.
- To find synonymous/interchangeable terms, use the "or" command (and enclose the phrase within parentheses). This command broadens your search.
  - "social media" and (marketing or advertising)

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