1. Introduction to the Information Research Process

Finding high quality information will help you to produce a good assignment. Efficient information handling skills will enable you to produce better coursework, give you more confidence when researching projects and impress your tutor!

Finding information can be daunting; you must be aware of the key information resources available to you and learn how to use them effectively. The aim is for you to spend more time working on your assignment and less time searching up blind alleys.

Using internet search engines is perfect for hobbies and interests. However, Google is not the best place to find information to support academic work. General search engines do not exert any quality control over the results they give you. Remember: anyone can publish anything on the web. There is a lot of sub-standard material out there as you have no doubt discovered.

Your tutors expect you to use high quality information sources i.e. material written by authoritative named individuals or responsible organisations. We are not ruling out the use of Google but simply saying there may be better places for you to look.

2. Planning a Literature Search

You should carry out your search in a logical sequence. To get the best results, follow the step by step instructions below.

   a) Developing a Search Strategy

Analysing the questions

What exactly is the topic you are searching for?
Example: What is the impact of early intervention on at risk children?

Look carefully at your essay title, and identify the key areas on which your essay will focus. First, try to pick out the keywords in your title and make a note of them.

What are the main concepts or keywords for your topic?
Example: children, early intervention, risk

Establishing the keywords means that you can ignore words which don’t add to the meaning of your topic, for example words like discuss, what or in.

Once you have identified your keywords think of alternative words that describe each of these concepts. Think of synonyms, acronyms, abbreviations, plurals and related terms. Use reference works to check for alternative terms and to check the relationship between different terms.
Are there any similar words that describe each of these concepts?

Example: prevention, infants, babies

You can combine keywords together using “operators” or linking words. The most common are AND, OR, NOT

How might you combine these keywords together to search?

Example:

- children AND risk: would return results containing both words
- children OR infants: would return results containing either the word children or the word infants
- “early intervention” NOT disorders: would exclude results containing disorders

Use these keywords to search for books, journals and other material using LibrarySearch.

Activity: Select one of your essay titles and spend 3 minutes discussing and planning some keywords on your chosen essay topic. If you don’t have an essay topic try the following: Are forensic social workers invisible?

Keywords:

b) Selecting information sources

- Textbooks and Reference Works

Why use reference sources?

To give you a basic overview and grasp of a topic and to familiarise yourself with its structure and terminology. Even in the electronic age, print resources such as the high quality textbooks which you will find in the libraries provide ideal background material for your coursework.

Key reference e-resources = Credo Reference and Encyclopedia Britannica (listed under Finding e-resources > reference resources on your subject guide)
Your reading list will give you references to books which may help you with your assignment. You may find that you need to read material that is not on your reading list, either because the books listed are out on loan to other students, or because you want to read more widely on your area of interest. Use LibrarySearch to find additional titles. All textbooks and reference books have detailed contents pages and indexes. Use these to find the information that you need. Information in textbooks and reference books will provide an overview, ensuring that you understand the structure and terminology of your topic before you search for journal literature. You may also want to consult a dictionary for basic definitions.

- **Journal Articles**

  **Why should I use journal articles?**

  **Answer** Journals are key sources of information. Original research will be published in journals long before the content appears in book form. Also, “review articles” will provide you with an overview.

There are two approaches to finding journal articles on your topic:

- Using LibrarySearch
- Searching bibliographic databases

**LibrarySearch**

You can use LibrarySearch to produce a list of journal articles relevant to your subject. It streamlines your research process by enabling you to search across many of our electronic resources and the library catalogue, all from one search box. So you can use it to quickly and easily search for print and electronic books, electronic journal articles, newspapers, theses, media and more.

**Databases**

If you can't find what you need in LibrarySearch try searching a database. The library has many different databases. Some databases focus on a subject, like management, or health. Some have research from particular countries. Some have historic information and some just have current research. A successful database search will produce a list of journal articles relevant to your subject. In many cases there will be a direct link to the full text but some records will simply give you an abstract (summary) and details of which journal, year and volume you need to check. Some databases show other types of publications like newspaper articles or images. You've just got to find the right database for your topic.

**Finding Databases Specific to Your Subject**

The library subscribes to a range of subject related and multidisciplinary databases from the UK and worldwide. As well as journal articles you can access a wide variety of information including statistics, newspapers images and more.

To find databases specific to your subject:

- Go to the Social Work subject guide [http://libguides.rhul.ac.uk/SocialWork](http://libguides.rhul.ac.uk/SocialWork)
Click on **Finding E-Resources**

The databases listed under Top E-Resources are the key resources for your subject area.

Databases from different suppliers or publishers will have different interfaces but the functions offered will tend to be the same. Each database will normally offer help screens to enable you to familiarise yourself with the features of that particular database.

**Top Databases for Social Work**

**Science Direct**
A major collection of over 1,500 journals on science, technology, medicine and the social sciences

**Social Care Online**
References to research briefings, government documents, reports, papers, grey literature and book chapters covering all aspects of social care including criminal justice, benefits, mental health, and family care.

**PsycINFO**
Useful info on mental health as the database has more than three million citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters, books, dissertations and technical reports on psychology, as well as information on the psychological aspects of related disciplines such as medicine, sociology, education, linguistics, anthropology, business and law.

**Social Policy and Practice**
A bibliographic database for evidence-based social science research, listing journal articles, reports, surveys and statistics in a range of topics including health, social care, housing and crime

**NHS Evidence**
A web-based portal which provides access to authoritative clinical and non-clinical evidence and best practice in health and social care.

**Academic Search Complete (via Senate House)**
A multidisciplinary database which provides full-text for over 4,450 scholarly publications, more than 3,500 of them peer-reviewed. Includes topics in the social sciences, humanities, general science, education and most areas of academic study. Abstracts and indexing provided for all 7,888 journals in the collection. Coverage is from 1965 to the present.
Activity: Go to libguides.rhul.ac.uk/SocialWork and select the Finding e-resources tab. Use one of the databases to find information on the topic using your chosen keywords.

1) Write down the search terms you used and how many results you found.

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<th>Search Terms</th>
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2) Limit your search to journal articles published in the last 5 years. How many results did you find?

3) Write down details (author, articles title, source, date) of two useful/relevant articles you have found and whether or not the full text is available?

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4) Save the two useful articles.
3. Off-Campus Access

Information on off-campus access can be found at:
https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/campus-life/library/undergraduate/off-campus-access.aspx

4. Using Other Libraries

As a Royal Holloway student you are entitled to access other university libraries in the UK. We always recommend checking the relevant online catalogue before you visit and contacting the Library beforehand if you want to access a specific item.

You can join the SCONUL Access Scheme free of charge, if you need to use another University library. All member libraries will permit you reference access, including reading and making photocopies of journal papers. Postgraduate and part-time students are also able to gain borrowing rights from many of the libraries participating in the scheme. You can obtain access by applying online on the SCONUL web site http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sconul-access

Senate House Library, the central University of London Library, is another important resource that enables Royal Holloway students and staff to be members and apply for a library card. As a member of Senate House Library you will be able to borrow material from the library and access electronic resources including e-journals and databases. Further information about membership can be found on their web site http://www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/membership/ You can register remotely, and gain a login to access their electronic resources, at https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/campus-life/library/undergraduate/using-other-libraries/using-other-libraries.aspx

5. Contact details

For further help or information, please contact your Information Consultant:

Emma Burnett

Email: Emma.Burnett@royalholloway.ac.uk

Profile page: http://libguides.rhul.ac.uk/emmaburnett

Your subject guide also contains lots of useful information http://libguides.rhul.ac.uk/SocialWork

For general library enquiries please email: library@royalholloway.ac.uk or phone: 01784 443823

The Library is also on Twitter @RHUL_Library and Facebook http://facebook.com/rhul.library and we have a blog http://libraryblog.rhul.ac.uk/