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Research Seminars 1

Semester VI

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LITERATURE SEARCH AND INFORMATION SKILLS IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE

The information skills required of academics in an electronic age are of a different magnitude to those required in a traditional information age. However, the main stages which researchers work through remain the same in IT and manual based searching. What has changed dramatically for today's researchers is the complexity of the tasks associated with each of the different stages, given the large increase in information available.

An important consideration for researchers is how to use a variety of data sources to find the required information. In addition to books and journals, there are many other sources of information such as newspapers, theses, research reports, computer databases, and so on. All this information is actually clamouring for your attention and only by organizing your searching and reading are you going to be able to find a way of controlling it.

STEPS IN BUILDING LITERATURE SEARCHES

Literature search techniques can be broadly defined as on-line or off-line. It is recommended that students browse in libraries before undertaking computerized searches. This might serve to expand the student's conception of what is important, which can then be built into a search strategy.

Using the Internet for very specific purposes, such as searching well-established organizations' home pages, can prove incredibly valuable and time efficient. Searching repositories, websites of scholars and using the search engine "Google Scholar" or "Advanced Search" can also be highly rewarding. The following links to open-access directories can help you in your literature search: Directory of Open Access Repositories https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/opendoar/; Directory of Open Access Journals https://www.doaj.org/. My website *Media Information Literacy for All* provides a substantial number of resources http://chouitnfissi.simplesite.com/.

But surfing the Internet in the hope of finding some literature of relevance is a riskier strategy and can be time consuming. Huge amounts of sources tend to be generated by Internet searches, most of which will prove to be completely useless. For these reasons students are actively discouraged from using the Internet in this way. It is also to be noted that many freely available electronic journals on the Internet do not use peer-review procedures. Research students should be well aware of this fact and critically evaluate the quality of such papers.

What the discussion above demonstrates, is the need for research students to acquire skills which will enable them to develop a multiple mode approach to

literature searching. It would be a mistake to think that some of the older more traditional forms of searching have been made obsolete by online searching. Students should pursue traditional methods of information access, such as face-to-face contacts, conference attendance and browsing in libraries in tandem with IT methods.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LITERATURE SEARCH

Once you have chosen a topic, you then have to find out more about the area. Students often find that the more they read, the more confused they become. There are numerous directions to pursue, and so many interesting articles to read. It is very easy to lose sight of your focus, and to continue reading and reading. When reading an article, you should always read it with a clearly defined purpose in mind. This means that you should always have an objective or have particular questions in mind; this facilitates your critical thinking skills through a focused lens as opposed to reading aimlessly. Your research question should be the guiding line in your search for references. This focused reading is also a very economic time-saving strategy, and can help prevent procrastination as you have very clear goals in mind, which can be broken down into smaller tasks if needed.

Previous research is a critical source of learning about a specific area. Published research provides a background into the issues that pertain to your research question so that your hypothesis and research question fit with existing constructs and, ultimately, with the results of previous studies. The research literature also suggests numerous ideas for interesting studies and describes established procedures that can be incorporated into your research design.

The literature review needs to have some academic respectability; therefore, the research literature does not refer to popular books and newspapers. It is important to focus on scholarly journals for the most current and valid developments in a particular area of research. However, as stated earlier, professional journals vary in the quality of the research that they present; for example, some research journals are refereed, meaning that each article undergoes peer review by authorities in the field (Editorial Board) who are experts in the relevant areas. Other journals do not have this structure in place, and the author of the article simply pays the publication costs. You should always check the section that details the journal's editorial policies.

The main sources of research literature include the following. Textbooks are very useful starting points for introducing your topic of interest. Textbooks usually rely on analysis of data from well-known work in particular areas. They also give the author's interpretations of findings. It is also necessary to read book chapters of relevance to your topic and original articles and review researchers' methodologies and results yourself. If your university/college does not hold a journal that you are interested in, it is possible to get an inter-library loan for the articles you need from your library.