

# RESEARCH GUIDE: CHOOSING APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

*Research means that you don't know but are willing to find out.*

*--Charles F. Kettering*

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The ability to conduct research is not limited to college or school; it is a skill you will use throughout your lifetime. Even if you don't think that you've conducted research, you probably have taken the time to discover more about a topic, and, once you graduate, you will need to conduct research when looking for a job or a place to live. Regardless of the question you're asking, two factors remain consistent: You need to exercise your curiosity when searching for information, and you have to be willing because research can be challenging work.

The research process will go more smoothly if you understand which resource to consult when you have a question. For example, if you wanted to find movie times for your local theatre, you probably wouldn't look in an encyclopedia. The same kind of analysis holds true in academic research. If you know where to begin, you're more likely to finish quickly instead of wasting time. This booklet is designed to introduce you to various types of information resources so you can choose wisely when you conduct research.

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## Academic research

When you're researching a topic for a class, you may be called upon to draw upon sophisticated research tools, such as databases, to find authoritative and current information. If you're simply indulging your curiosity, you may have more leeway when considering your sources. But in academic research, you need to consult resources that have been written by experts and present highly accurate information that has been fact-checked.

As a researcher, you should have competency in four distinct areas: 1) choosing appropriate resources; 2) searching effectively and efficiently; 3) evaluating resources critically; and 4) citing research in an appropriate documentation style. This booklet addresses the first competency listed: choosing appropriate resources. It will give you a general overview of the kinds of resources and the sort of information they provide, and it will help you locate such resources at SOCC. That way, you can choose the right resource for your question. As you to continue your career, you will hone your research skills so they go beyond what is presented in this booklet.

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## Books

Books are excellent sources of information, particularly if you're looking for a deep and thoughtful analysis. Books take a lot of time to write, and authors have generally thought about the subject matter quite deeply. Books also may have a large scope; it is quite possible that you'll find a book that covers much more material than you need to answer your question. Be sure to use the index and/or table of contents to help you locate information more precisely.

You can find books by searching our online catalog, [Coastline](#). Because we share our collection with all the libraries in Coos County, you have access to more than half-a-million items. When you search Coastline and find a book at another library, you can have that book sent the Southwestern Oregon Community College. Simply place a hold on the item by clicking the "place hold" button and follow the onscreen directions. Your books should arrive in 2-3 days if it is not checked out.

You can begin to search for books by using keywords. If you find a book that seems pertinent to your topic, scroll toward the bottom of the entry for that book. You should find a set of live links. These links are "subject headings" that will help you find more relevant books on your topic. Click on the links to find other books that have the same subject as the one

that you found earlier. Unless you know the exact phrasing of a subject heading, it might be best to search by keyword and find your subject headings by using this method.

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## Reference books

Reference books provide overviews on subjects. They do not present original research, and they usually are not read from cover-to-cover. Instead, people refer to them by looking up entries; that's why they are called reference books. If you need an authoritative overview on a topic, you will be well-served to consult a reference book.

At the library, we have many reference books, including general encyclopedias like *World Book*. These books may be too general for specialized research. Thus, we have specialized encyclopedias and dictionaries on many different subjects. These multivolume sets are often good starting points for research. In addition to our print collection of reference books, we have an online collection:

- *Credo Reference*: This resource offers access to more than 300 reference books that you can search at the same time. Like all reference books, these articles will not contain original research but will provide factual information about a topic. Reference books provide overviews, definitions, and explanations of concepts. You can access this collection under the "Reference Tools" tab on the library's [home page](#).
- *Reference Resources on the Internet*: In addition to our online reference collection, the library has a list of websites that might assist you in conducting research. These websites provide authoritative information and have been selected by librarians because they are reliable resources. You can find links to online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and more reference resources by clicking on "Information sites" under the "Reference Tools" tab on the library's [home page](#).

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## Articles

Articles are also excellent resources for academic research. If you're looking for an article, you should search a database, not the library's catalog or the web. The library has access to more than 18,000 online journals and more than 200 print journals. To find information in these journals, you should consult a database.

Most databases require a subscription, and the library pays for the right to offer access to students. Thus, you can access these databases for free because you are a student. We have access to several databases, which you can search 24/7 by going to the library's website, selecting a database title, and logging in with your library card's barcode or your student ID.

Because the library subscribes to more than three dozen databases, you will want to select a database that is relevant to your subject and your research needs. Librarians have made it easy to choose databases based upon your subject. You can access databases from the library's home page:

[SOCC library](#) → [Find an article](#) → [Choose databases by subject](#) → Select your subject → Select a database

[SOCC Library](#) → [Find an article](#) → [Top 6 databases](#) → Select a database name

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## Types of articles

Most articles are published in journals, newspapers, magazines and other publications that come out periodically. Thus, they are called periodicals. Periodical literature is usually focused on a specific topic; unlike books, periodical articles are not covering a wide scope. Unlike reference books, periodical articles generally do not provide overviews of topics or

introductions to material. Instead, they consist of reports, analyses, or essays on a particular subject, and many of them include a specific point of view. Here are descriptions of the different kinds of periodicals and what they may provide:

- **Popular journals:** Popular journals are aimed at the general public. Writers are reporters or journalists, who have spoken with or consulted experts and have written the article so that information is accessible by the public. Examples of popular journals include *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report* and other magazines. Popular journals are often available at newsstands or bookstores. Popular journals are visually interesting; they are likely to have glossy pages, photographs, catchy article titles, and advertisements. This is because popular journals have to attract the public in order to sell.
- **Scholarly or peer-reviewed journals:** Scholarly journals contain articles that were written by experts, and they are aimed at experts. The information in scholarly journals can be highly sophisticated because the writers assume that their readers already know the basics on a particular topic. Usually, scholarly journals are not found in newsstands or bookstores; instead, they are found in academic libraries, and they generally do not have flashy names. Scholarly journals are not commercial in nature; reading scholarly literature is part of the job of scholars, practitioners and other experts, so the journals don't need to sell themselves. Thus, they generally do not contain advertising, and they also aren't trying to "hook" their readers with a captivating title or photo.
- **Newspapers:** Newspapers contain reports and articles related to current events. They describe significant events for a community, and reporters try to present material without bias. Reporters strive to present facts in their stories, and newspapers often fill people in on recent changes on policies or other noteworthy events. Newspapers generally publish opinion pieces or editorials as well. In these columns, the editors express their opinions about current events, and they provide analysis of the news story. Newspapers are available to the general public. They contain advertisements, but their pages are not glossy or bound. Instead, newspapers are usually discarded by consumers once they've been perused.

Periodical databases provide access to articles from all of the publication types listed above. If you need to find information from a magazine, scholarly journal, newspaper, or popular journal, you should consult a periodical database.

Some articles, though, are not published in traditional periodicals but were created for specific reference databases. These articles are similar to entries in reference books because they provide overviews on topics. However, they are usually more detailed than reference entries, and these reference articles were designed for students rather than the general public. These articles introduce students to a conversation about a topic that started long before those students entered college. Usually, they provide an overview of a controversial topic, a discussion of the arguments for and against that topic, and a list of recommended reading. These are excellent "research starters" and can help you in developing your paper's thesis.

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### Choose appropriate databases

Here's a brief overview of popular databases at SOCC:

- ***Points of View:*** This database offers overviews of topics with points and counterpoints to see both sides of an issue as well as articles from periodicals. Points of View provides access to reference articles that were written for students, and it also provides access to periodical articles, such as newspapers, journals, and magazines. All articles are full-text, so they can be accessed from your computer with a click of a mouse.
- ***Issues & Controversies:*** This database contains articles and essays written specifically for college students who are conducting research on controversial topics. It does not contain articles from periodicals because the articles were written solely for the database. However, these essays provide excellent starting points for research, especially in papers that require an argument on a complex, current social issue. All articles are full-text, so they are a mouse-click away.

- *Academic Search Premier*: Our most popular periodical database, Academic Search Premier offers information on a wide range of subjects. You can access articles from scholarly or peer-reviewed journals as well as articles from magazines and newspapers. Thus, this database presents original research from experts, and information may be highly sophisticated, especially if you look for scholarly articles, and it will also contain information aimed at the public in popular journals and newspapers. You can find for articles that are available with one click of your mouse by searching for full-text articles, or you can conduct a more comprehensive search for articles that may need to be ordered through interlibrary loan.

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## Reliability of resources and critical thinking

If you find an article in a database, it has probably gone through the editorial process. Articles that have gone through the editorial process have been read by multiple readers and fact-checked for accuracy. The information presented has been verified, which suggests that these resources are reliable and trustworthy. Many instructors prefer that students use such resources in their research precisely because such information is reliably accurate. Web resources, on the other hand, require that you verify the accuracy, objectivity and authority of the resource, which is a fairly taxing chore. More information on that subject is below, and you can also consult the research guide on evaluating a website on the library's web page.

Even if your source is reliable and authoritative, you will need to read it critically. When conducting research, you are not expected to parrot back your findings in a paper. Instead, your instructors expect that you will analyze the information presented in each resource. You will synthesize information found from multiple resources in order to come to a deeper understanding of a topic. By doing such work, you're building a solid foundation of information that you can use to support your thesis or position. So, read information resources critically, even if they come from reliable sources.

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## Websites

The Internet makes puts a wealth of information at our fingertips. However, much of that information may be inappropriate for academic research. While there are wonderful and informative websites, there are also many websites that are out-of-date, inaccurate, or biased toward a certain perspective.

Moreover, some articles published on the web have gone through an editorial process; others have not been through an editorial process. You can easily find a website that has not been fact-checked or verified, even if it looks polished and professional. Because you cannot be sure if the information published on the web is accurate, you need to evaluate the reliability of the information even before you begin critical reading.

As a researcher, your job includes the active evaluation of your resources. You need to be thoughtful when reading websites, and you need to think about whether such information is trustworthy. Here are a few questions to ask yourself when you evaluate a website:

- Who wrote this webpage? Does the author have credentials?
- Is this webpage affiliated with a credible organization?
- When was the website last updated?
- What is the purpose of the organization that is hosting the website?
- Does the author provide a bibliography?

For more information on evaluating a website, you can consult the library's online guide, "[How to evaluate a website.](#)" In addition, you may want to take a look at the Research Guide on Evaluating Information Sources, which will offer tips on how to determine whether articles are appropriate for academic research and how to make decisions about the information found when consulting databases, the internet, and the library's catalog.