Finding, Evaluating, and Citing Information Sources

The academic research project is a standard feature of every student’s life at Cornell. Consequently, for every student, research projects raise important questions, such as, *Where do you find the information you need for your research? How do you find it? How do you evaluate and manage that information once you find it?*

When engaging in academic research, you have to be a savvy information shopper and a savvy consumer, too. You must:

1. Know where and how to search efficiently to find the best information for your purposes
2. Make good decisions regarding the quality and appropriateness of your information sources, including assessing whether a resource is trustworthy and up-to-date
3. Know who has rights to the work you use
4. Know how to properly give others credit for their ideas
5. Know the extent to which you can ethically remix or synthesize ideas and information in your own work

This is where research skills [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/intro] and knowledge of Cornell’s [academic integrity guidelines] link to http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html are key.

Your approach to information research, like your needs and requirements regarding sources of information, will vary depending on what you research. For example, you may be researching scholarly articles for a paper, popular news and opinion for a speech, images and video for a multimedia project, or blog posts and Wikipedia articles for the latest movie news. A quick Google or Wikipedia search may suit your purposes in some scenarios, but, for academic research, that’s just the first step.

When you conduct academic research, you join a community of scholars in a chain of conversation and truth seeking that has gone on for centuries before you. In the Internet age, you have more access to more of that collected information than anyone ever has in any age before you. But with unprecedented powers come unprecedented challenges, and, online, you face those challenges in a landscape of continuous change. Digital literacy is, in part, knowledge about how and when to use the wide variety of tools you need—digital, print, and personal—to complete your assignments. Although there is no single “right” way to conduct information research, certain methods and skills can make your research efforts more efficient and effective.

Identifying a Research Topic

Choosing a Topic

Research usually starts with a question, and formulating that question can be the hardest part of the process. Before you can find the right question to ask, you need some context or background about your topic.

From Cornell University Library's Introduction to Research tutorial (2009), here are some approaches you can use to choose and explore a research topic:

- Discuss your ideas with your course instructor, TA, or a librarian. [add period at end]
- Look at popular news articles and blog posts to see what's currently in the news about your topic. [add period at end]
- Perform a Google search using Google. This is a very popular approach, and it can be a good one, but it is not the only option available to you. Explore this resource for additional ideas.
- Use an encyclopedia for your subject or discipline; the index or list of topics can give you additional ideas. Wikipedia isn't the only online encyclopedia available! (Read our caveats regarding the use of Wikipedia in the section called Using Wikipedia.) Online reference works[link to http://wfxresearch.webfeat.org/clients/wfxcornell/cornellSubjects.asp?cid=12378&catID=General%20Interest%20and%20Reference&subcatLink=Dictionaries%20and%20Encyclopedias] available through your library can give you a quick and authoritative starting point, especially for more specialized subjects.
- Check your library catalog [change all library catalog links to http://cornell.worldcat.org] for books and other resources on the topic. [add period at end]

Use sources like these to understand the broader context of your topic. They can tell you in general terms what is known about it, including what
Testing the Topic with a Search

First, state your topic idea as a question or a sentence. For example, you might be interested in finding out, “How did Title IX impact women athletes in college athletic programs?” Before you commit to this or any specific topic for your research, use the [library databases] link to http://wfxsearch.webfeat.org/clients/wfxcornell/wf3_cornell.asp?cid=12378] to test it. Academic Search Premier [link to http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/5820912] or Proquest Research Library [link to http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/umip/aqg6345] are often a good first step because they are trustworthy general resources that cover many subject areas. The library subscribes to thousands of databases - [long dashes] collections of articles, images and data - [long dashes] in a wide range of disciplines that cover in-depth information that is often not available for free online.

While you can usually just search for some words or a phrase in an online search engine, library databases require you to search in particular ways, if they are going to recognize your search. Depending on the resource you are using, the exact methods you'll use to search will vary, but most library databases use similar methods, called Boolean searching. [ED NOTE: CUT: This isn't necessarily true. Many databases have a basic search that does not require very much of the patron.]

The more specific you can be about what you are looking for, the more effective your search will be. To define your potential search terms, identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. In this case, they are “Title IX,” “women,” “athletes,” and “college athletic programs.”

Now perform the search. Review the search results to determine if your topic is:

- Too large. Are there far too many search results? Maybe you can focus or narrow the topic a little more.
- Covered comprehensively elsewhere. Did a number of people already fully explore this topic? Check with your TA or professor if you aren’t sure about the answer to this question. They may be able to suggest a new perspective on what seems like an old or overdone topic, or they may suggest that you choose an alternative topic instead.
- Too specific or too new. You may find there just isn’t enough information available to complete the project. This can be particularly important if you are planning on using data in your research. You may need to broaden your topic by using a more general term or terms in your search.

It’s helpful to create and refine your search multiple times as you hone your ideas, find new pathways, change your ideas, and learn more about the subject area. For more information on choosing and developing your topic and testing your search, see “Choosing and Developing Your Topic” [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/intro#1Choosinganddevelopingaresearchtopic-1Ch\] in the Cornell University Library’s Introduction to Research tutorial.

If you complete your test, and you are still in doubt, ask your professor.

[CUT] Narrowing and Broadening a Search

Let’s look at some techniques for narrowing your search. One option is to add more words or specialized terms that describe your topic, putting “AND” between each word. For example, search “women AND athletes AND college AND athletics.” By using “AND” in capital letters between each term, you indicate that you aren’t looking for the word “and,” but that instead you are specifying a Boolean operation requiring the inclusion of all terms in the search.

If you’re getting a lot of articles or books that mention your topic, but which haven’t been written directly about it, you can narrow your search of library catalogs and article databases by using subject headings. Subject headings (sometimes called “descriptors” or “suggested topics”) are words the databases use to tag everything about the topic. For example, you might search for “women athletes,” but find that useful subject headings (usually found in the complete record for an item that fits your criteria) are “women-athletes United States” or “sports for women.” Once you have discovered these, you can search by subject instead of by keyword or by terms, to locate additional information that’s pertinent your topic.

Also, you can exclude words by using “NOT” (for example, “women athletes NOT basketball,” if you want to exclude anything that mentions that sport). But be careful! Doing so will exclude anything that mentions the negated term, even once.

You can also narrow your search by publication dates, language, type of document, and other criteria. Doing so will enable you to find what you want with just a few clicks without having to trawl through thousands of results.

Now let’s consider ways of broadening your search. You can do this by using a more general term or terms or by thinking of synonyms or related terms. For example, you can search “women OR female OR gender OR woman.” By using the word “OR” in capital letters between each term, you indicate that you aren’t looking for the word “or,” but rather that you’re looking for any of those variations on “woman.”

Most databases also let you search for variations of words using a process called truncation. For example, “athlet*” can be used to find “athlete,” “athletes,” “athletic,” anything that begins with those letters, no matter what its final letters are.

Note: These techniques usually appear in most databases and library resources, though the way they appear will vary. Always check the search tips or Help to find out how they work in a particular database or [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/ask]. Ask-a-Librarian [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/ask]. (TC) All search engines may not have the same features.

Finding and Evaluating Sources

In this topic, you can read about:

- Finding Sources of Information
- Getting the Material
- Evaluating Sources
- Why Everything Isn't Available Online and Free

Finding Sources of Information

There are several approaches you can take to finding information for a research paper. Two approaches are:

1. Look for information through the library and
2. Look for information using search engines.

Finding Information through in the Library

A search using Google or Google Scholar can result in millions of potential sources, so it's no wonder these tools are such popular choices. However, there are lots of specialized databases that you won't find in a Google or Google Scholar search. These specialized databases can link you to thousands of academic resources, such as research articles, business & legal information resources, or statistical surveys. The Library's guides ([link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/libguides]) can also connect you to some of the great databases in your field—whether you are a marketing major or a philosophy student. In addition, the library's catalog will link you to books and journals that aren't yet available online. Cornell, like other universities, is digitizing many of its historic collection but there are still millions of volumes that are not yet in digital form. Here are some ways you can begin finding information for your research assignment:

- Try a general database like Academic Search Premier or Proquest Research Library ([link to Academic Search Premier http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/5820912] or Proquest Research Library [link to http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/umip/aqg6345]).
- Initially find articles on any topic you wish.
- Check the library catalog for books or good background sources on a topic.
- Start with a subject or course guide for your topic area.
- Look at a database in your subject area. The library subscribes to scholarly resources in a wide variety of disciplines that aren't available anywhere else for free, such as JSTOR for the humanities and social sciences, Web of Knowledge for the sciences or Lexis Nexis for newspapers, legal information and more.
- Ask a librarian using the Ask a Librarian tool or schedule a research consultation. ([link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/ask/consult])

All of these approaches will give you useful resources on your topic.

Finding Information Using Search Engines

You're probably already familiar with searching for information on the Internet. Here are a few academic objectives that a general Web search can help you to meet:

- Starting a topic search and seeing what is generally available
- Finding and verifying citations
- Finding material that's not in the published scholarly literature. (The government has a mandate to publish to the Web, and lots of organizations, think tanks, and foundations publish their research online exclusively. Also, if you're looking for conference proceedings or white papers, the Web is a good place to start.)

Effective use of the Web in information research means more than just throwing a couple of keywords into a search engine and seeing what the first few results are. Here are The "Using Google" section offers some tips for performing a targeted Google search using Google, as well as some tips for using other available sources of information.
Using Google

The most popular search engine is Google. The following are some tips for using Google to get the best results available:

Perform a standard search:

The simplest and most common way to perform a standard Google search is to enter one or more carefully chosen keywords in the search box on the Google main page.

Perform an advanced search:

Although the standard search provides results, you may find that you get a much more relevant set of search results by using the Advanced Search option.

- Search a particular Web site. If there's a particular Web site that might cover your topic, you can use the Google Advanced Search field to search within a site or domain, along with a particular keyword or keywords appropriate to your topic, to search that site to the exclusion of everything else on the Web. For example, suppose you want to search Cornell's site for references to plagiarism. To perform that search, enter "www.cornell.edu" in the Google Advanced Search field, and then enter "plagiarism" in the "all these words" field.
- Search a particular class of Web sites. If you want to search only a particular class of Web sites, for example education sites, you can use Google Advanced Search to do that, too. To search only sites ending in ".edu," enter ".edu" in the "Search within a site or domain" field.

Use Google Scholar:

For scholarly research, you also can use Google Scholar. Google Scholar searches a more academic subset of the Web. Although what Google considers scholarly will sometimes differ from what your professors and librarians consider scholarly, in general, Google Scholar will return a more relevant set of results than a regular Google Search.

**TIP:** You can use Google Scholar to get to some (though certainly not all) of the resources the library has licensed from off-campus (it's automatic if you are on campus). See Why Everything Isn't Available Online and Free for more information about licensed resources and why you need to indicate that you are affiliated with Cornell to get these paid services.

Set your Google Scholar Preferences so that Google recognizes you as a Cornell person, knows what you have access to, and will let you keep your references in a citation management program.

- In Google Scholar, go to [Scholar Preferences link](http://scholar.google.com/scholar_preferences?hl=en) so that Google recognizes you as a Cornell person.
- Under Library Links settings, choose the Cornell options and under Bibliography Manager, choose RefWorks.
- Now Get It! Cornell links (which will link to the full-text article, help you search the Cornell University Library catalog for the source, or allow you to request the article through interlibrary loan) appear in your search results, as well as links to Export to RefWorks or other citation management software.

Additional Resources

- Google Book Search (search tips)
Google Books is a project that makes millions of books available online, either in full text or in snippets. There are a number of other initiatives to make books available online, such as the Internet Archive, and the digital collections available from Cornell at http://bookstore.library.cornell.edu (the latter often enabling you to buy print copies of digitized sources, as well as paid print-on-demand through services like Amazon.com).

Beyond Google

Other Internet Sources of Information

Google does not cover everything! (No single Web site or search engine can.) So you need to have more tools than just Google at your disposal. Cornell University Library subscribes to thousands of scholarly databases and journals [link to http://wfxsearch.webfeat.org/clients/wfxcornell/wf3_cornell.asp?cid=12378] that are available from your desktop. You can find millions of books [link to http://cornell.worldcat.org] in its stacks and online, many of which are not freely accessible on the Internet. Even if the item you're looking for is available somewhere online, it may not be possible to find it using search engines, and it may not be available for free. Furthermore, the fact that one search engine can find it doesn't guarantee that another one will be able to! Every search engine finds different things. So you need to have more tools than just Google at your disposal. The following are a few other sources of information on the Internet:

- The [Cornell University Library website][http://www.library.cornell.edu/]. This is the best starting place for scholarly research. The library has:
  - guides [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/libguides/] to some of the best and most authoritative resources on the Web and in print (often available only through the library website). A great deal of scholarly information is either contained in databases that aren't indexed by search engines, or is put together on the fly by databases and, as such, doesn't show up among search engine results. This body of effectively invisible information is called the "deep Web" or the "invisible Web." To mine the deep Web, you'll need to go to [individual databases](http://wfxsearch.webfeat.org/clients/wfxcornell/wf3_cornell.asp?cid=12378) from the library website.
  - information about library services [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/svcs/] that can help you do research
  - ways to [Ask a Librarian][link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/ask/] for help or to get consultations and help from experts

- Information portals. Sometimes universities, organizations, and other groups will put together portals of information on a subject. Sites like the Librarians' Index to the Internet [link to http://lii.org/] or subject-specific scholarly portals like Intute [link to http://www.intute.ac.uk/], BUBL [link to http://bubl.ac.uk/], Voice of the Shuttle [link to http://vos.ucsb.edu/], and others can give you pointers to lots of information in your area. But, as with any website, make sure you understand who developed the site, whether it has a particular bias, and whether it is regularly maintained.

- Other search engines. Google is not the only one! Others, such as Yahoo, MSN/Windows Live/Bing, or Ask.com, will give you different results.

Additional Resources

- Librarians' Index to the Internet
- Voice of the Shuttle
- Invisible or Deep Web: What it is, how to find it, and its inherent ambiguity

Getting Material

Finding books and articles for your topic is just the first step. Getting the whole book or the full-text version of an article if the full text is not online is the next step. To accomplish this, you can:

- Search the library catalog [link to http://cornell.worldcat.org] for the title (or journal title if it's an article)
- Use Get It! Cornell links (which will link to the full-text article, help you search the Cornell University Library catalog for the source, or allow you to request the article through interlibrary loan)
- Install CUL Passkey on your browser (or go through the library website [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/index] or Uportal [link to http://guest.uportal.cornell.edu/uPortal/render.uP]) to get into licensed materials from off campus
- Use [interlibrary loan and document delivery services [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/svcs/borrow] if full text isn't available through Cornell. For more information see Finding books, articles and other material from the library's Introduction to Research tutorial.

Additional Resources

- How to Read Citations (video)
- Finding Books Shelved in Olin Library (video)

Evaluating Sources

Once you have found information on your topic, analyzing and evaluating the results of your search can be a challenge. How will you know if you have found the most authoritative, accurate, objective, and up-to-date scholarly information available? Use the Source Evaluation Checklist, a
guide to thinking critically about what you find.

Four Types of Periodicals

How do you distinguish scholarly from nonscholarly periodicals—journals from magazines? Journals and magazines are important sources of up-to-date information in all disciplines. Periodical literature can be grouped into four categories:

- Scholarly
- Substantive news or general interest
- Popular
- Sensational


Scholarly Articles: Peer-Reviewed or Not?

Scholarly articles are judged according to whether or not they are peer-reviewed. Peer-reviewed journals contain articles that have been examined by experts in the field (perhaps on the journal’s editorial board) and evaluated on the quality of their research. This is an entirely different thing from the type of peer review you may perform in your classes (since you and your classmates probably are not generally recognized authorities in any field).

The following are a couple of ways you can tell if a journal is peer-reviewed:

- If it’s online, go to the journal home page and check the “about” page under About This Journal. Often the brief description of the journal you find there will note that it’s peer-reviewed or refereed or will list the editors or editorial board.
- In some library databases, there will be a feature that will automatically limit your search to scholarly or peer-reviewed articles. [add period]
- Go to the database Ulrich’s [link to http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/4135101/] and do a Title (Keyword) search for the journal. If it is peer-reviewed or refereed, the title will have a little umpire [remove hyphen] shirt symbol next to it.
- Be careful! A journal can be refereed or peer-reviewed and still have articles in it that are not peer-reviewed. Generally, if the article is an editorial, a brief news item, or a short communication, it will not have been through the full peer-review process. Most databases like Web of Knowledge will let you restrict your search exclusively to articles (and not editorials, conference proceedings, etc. and so on).

Sources: Primary or Secondary?

Sometimes your professor will ask you to consult primary sources on a subject. The characteristics of primary sources vary, depending on the field of investigation, but in general, the following observations about primary sources are accurate:

- They can be original, firsthand reports of new research findings, original historical documents or eyewitness accounts of events, or the actual artistic or literary work
- In the sciences and some social sciences, primary research articles are usually divided into the following sections: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and References
- [Cut third bullet point]

You may also choose to use some secondary sources (summaries or interpretations of original research or events), which can be books (available through the library catalog) or review articles (ones which organize and critically analyze the research others have conducted on a topic). These secondary sources are often useful, easy-to-read summaries of research in an area. Additionally, you can use the references listed at the end of them to find useful primary sources.

Additional Resources

- Research Minutes
- How to Identify Scholarly Journal Articles (video)
- How to Identify Substantive News Articles (video)

For more information on primary versus secondary articles, please see the following:

- San Jose State Tutorial on Primary vs. Secondary Resources
- [Cut the James Cook University link]
- Ithaca College’s Guide to Primary and Secondary Sources

Source Evaluation Checklist

Use this “Evaluating Web Resources” checklist from Cornell University Library’s Introduction to Research
tutorial to evaluate the information sources you discover as a result of performing a search. Check the items in each of the following categories:

**Purpose**

- What is the purpose or motivation for the source? (E.g., educational, commercial, entertainment, or promotional.)
- Is it trying to sell you something? How easy is it to differentiate advertisement from content in the source?
- Based on your knowledge, is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- Who is the intended audience for the information, and how is this fact reflected in the organization and presentation of the material?

**Authority**

- Is the author identifiable?
- What is the author's background? (E.g., experience, credentials, and occupation, and has he or she published anything else on the topic?)
- Does the author cite his or her sources?
- **Currency** How current is the publication?
- When was the resource last updated or revised, and how often is it updated?

**Reliability**

How stable does the resource seem to be? The resource's dependability (particularly in the case of Web sites) is important if it is going to be cited as a source or recommended for use by others.

- For Web sites, do most of the links on the page work?
- From your evaluation of currency and authority, do you think the resource will be there the next time you visit it?

**Coverage**

- What information is included or omitted?
- Is the resource completed or under construction?

These are not the only criteria you should evaluate, but you will need to look at. Depending on what your professor has asked you for and on your research needs, you may need to look for certain kinds of material. In academic research in particular, your professor may ask you to find scholarly, peer-reviewed, or primary sources.

**Additional Resources**

- Printable PDF: SourceEvaluationChecklist.pdf

**Using Wikipedia**

*Wikipedia is one of the most amazing projects to emerge in recent years. Before Wikipedia, the idea that the sum of human knowledge could be collected and updated by ordinary people had been unthinkable. It is unparalleled as a barometer of knowledge production and epistemology. Never before in history have the collective seeking of so many people and the battle for a neutral point of view in knowledge production been so open, transparent, and democratic.*

As a tool for scholarly research, Wikipedia can be either a grade-killer or a valuable friend, depending on who you ask and what you hope to accomplish using it. What is fairly certain is that your professor won't let you cite it in a scholarly research paper.

There are a few common reasons why you can't cite Wikipedia:

- *Wikipedia is an encyclopedia. At the collegiate or university level, your professors are looking for more than general rudimentary material. General encyclopedias usually give baseline information, the type of common knowledge that isn't usually cited.* [Academic subject-specific encyclopedias](http://wfxsearch.webfeat.org/clients/wfxcornell/cornellSubjects.asp?cid=12378&catID=General%20Interest%20and%20Reference&subcatLink=Dictionaries%20and%20Encyclopedias) will often provide more scholarly and citeable information.
- *There is often no way to know who is editing the entries in Wikipedia or what his or her level of expertise is.*
• You cannot be sure that the content is "permanent" (although you can look at the revision history on the History page). [add period]
• You cannot be sure that the content meets standards of academic rigor. One of Wikipedia's main principles is that it strives for a neutral point of view (which it abbreviates to NPOV). This standard states that all articles should strive to "represent...all significant views on each topic fairly, proportionately, and without bias." The problem is that in any knowledge endeavor, much less a collaborative and ad hoc venture like Wikipedia, deciding what's neutral and having something reviewed for NPOV can be controversial undertakings---and too uncertain to meet standards of academic rigor. However, having such a debate take place publicly on Wikipedia makes for interesting talk-page reading and for a good pros-and-cons debate.

Two other Wikipedia policies relevant to academic rigor are its verifiability and "no original research" policies.

**Tips for Using Wikipedia Effectively**

Use Wikipedia to get a general overview, and follow the references it provides as far as they can take you.

Look at the Discussion tab to see if the article you’re reading is part of a WikiProject, meaning that a group of people who care about the subject area are working in concert on its content. They may not be experts in the subject, but signing onto a WikiProject implies a writer has more than a casual interest in it.

If it is part of a WikiProject, see if it has been rated. Articles in WikiProjects go through a type of peer review. This is not the same type of peer review your professor talks about regarding scholarly research, but even such a limited review does at least imply that someone from the WikiProject has looked at the article at some point and assigned a quality rating to it. In any case, to be fairly sure that a Wikipedia article expresses what laypeople might need to know to consider themselves reasonably informed, look for a rating of B/A or above.

**Additional Resources**

You may wish to consult any or all of the following for additional help in finding and evaluating sources:

- Wikipedia assignments
- Wikipedia's Neutral Point of View guideline
- Wikipedia on verifiability
- Wikipedia on original research (example)
- Wikipedia: Peer review
- The Seven Steps of the Research Process. A resource designed to answer questions about evaluating sources of information.
- Critically Analyzing Information Sources. This resource lists some of the critical questions you should ask when you consider the appropriateness of a particular book, article, media resource, or Web site for your research.
- Distinguishing Scholarly from Nonscholarly Periodicals: A Checklist of Criteria. This resource shows how to evaluate periodicals by looking at their format, intended audience, and appearance.
- Evaluating Web Sites: Criteria and Tools. This resource lists ways to analyze the Web sites you find.
- Evaluating Resources and Evaluating Web Resources. These resources, available on the Introduction to Research page at the Cornell University Library Web site, provide additional information.
- Five Criteria for Evaluating Web Sites. This resource offers a table of suggestions.

**Why Everything Isn’t Available Online and Free**

One of the key things to know is that, particularly with scholarly material, not everything is online yet. What is, often isn't free.

If you’ve ever found the perfect article for your paper, looked for it in an online database, and then found that the library doesn’t have it or that it’s only available in print, then you know that not everything is available online. If you’ve ever searched Google, Google Scholar, or Yahoo, come across an article, and been asked to pay for it, you know that not everything online is free. If you’ve ever searched a database and found articles you never saw when you searched elsewhere, you know that articles can be online in one place but not in another. The move from print to the digital world is a complex one, and librarians can help you figure out how to get what you need. The library's interlibrary loan and other borrowing services can get you almost anything from anywhere without charge, and the library is involved in a number of initiatives to make more articles and research available to you online for free.

Also, making the full body of scholarly research available, in particular that found in print books, has taken considerably longer than originally anticipated due to costs and copyright issues. Cornell University Library and several other libraries, in partnership with Google (and other groups), are enabling the scanning of thousands of scholarly books that were previously only available in print. Currently, in Google Book Search, there are hundreds of public-domain books (published before 1923) that are fully viewable online, and thousands more you can either see brief snippets of or citations from.

**Additional Resources**

- Google Book Search (search tips)
Citing Sources

Finding the information for your research paper and determining whether that information fits what you need is just the first part of the process. Next, when you’re using this information in your own work, you’ll need to cite your sources to avoid plagiarism. Ethical standards require that you give credit to all published authors for their ideas. This is especially true in scholarship, but the principle of proper reference documentation applies to other areas as well. In addition, it is important to cite the sources that you use so that someone reading your work can track them down and come to their own conclusions about them.

When Do I Cite?

According to the College of Arts and Sciences’ plagiarism tutorial [link to http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm] on “When do I need to document sources?” (2005), “If you use any external sources in your work, you must document every instance you do so. There are several ways of incorporating outside sources into your own work.

Direct Citation

- The source is quoted directly, word for word
- The source material is reproduced without alteration (e.g., diagrams, charts, other audiovisual material)

Indirect Citation

- Part or all of someone else’s idea is reproduced in your own words (what is commonly known as a paraphrase)
- Someone else’s research is used or summarized
- Facts or data are used that are not common knowledge
- Source material is reproduced in slightly altered form while retaining the main idea or structure of the original

Both direct and indirect citations require proper documentation. Quotations, in particular, must be enclosed within quotation marks or set off in block quotes.”

Additional Resources

- Annotated Bibliography Tutorial
- “When Do I Need to Document Sources?” in Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism

Citation Formats Resource

From the library guide on citation management, these are the most common formats for citing sources. If you are unsure which style to use, ask your professor.

- APA: American Psychological Association
- MLA: Modern Language Association
- Chicago Manual of Style

Citation Formatting and Management Tools

It can be difficult to keep up with citation styles and the changes within and among them. To take the guesswork out of the process, there are a number of citation management software programs. This type of software will format your bibliography and footnotes for you. It’s also a great way to keep track of all the information you’ve found.

We especially recommend RefWorks [link to http://reworks.cornell.edu] (Internet-based and free to current Cornell students, staff, and faculty) and Endnote (desktop-based).

You may also wish to refer to the Annotated Bibliography Tutorial.
Examples of Citations in APA Format from APA Citation Style guide

Books, One Author, in print


Journal Article, one author, accessed online


Audiovisual Media

References to audiovisual media must include the following elements: name and function of the primary contributors (e.g., producer, director), date, title, the medium in brackets, location or place of production, and name of distributor. If the medium appears as part of the retrieval ID, brackets are not needed.

Videocassette/DVD


Audio Recording


Motion Picture


Television Broadcast


Episode of a Television Show from a Series


Music Recording


Data and Undated Content from Web Sites and Blogs

For content that does not easily fit into common categories like "journal paper," "book," or "report," keep in mind the goal of a citation is to give the reader a clear path to the source material. For electronic and online materials, include a stable URL or database name and include the author, title, and date published where available. For undated materials, include the date the resource was accessed.

Blog Entry


Professional Web Site


Data Set from a Database


Entire Web Site

When citing an entire Web site (and not a specific document on that site), no reference-list entry is required if the address for the site is cited in the text of your paper.

Witchcraft in Europe and America is a site that presents the full text of many essential works in the literature of witchcraft and demonology (http://www.witchcraft.psmmedia.com/).

Additional Resources

- Guides for Citing Sources
- Purdue OWL tutorials
Digital Literacy FAQ

Using the Internet to Research Topics

Q: How do I choose a topic for my paper?
A: How to choose a topic for a research paper is a big question, probably beyond the scope of this resource. But if you need a few practical ideas to help you get started, please see the page called "Identifying a Topic" section.

Q: I'm looking for general books and articles on a particular subject. Where do I start?
A: See "Finding Information in the Library".

Q: How do I find a particular book?
A: Search the library catalog [link to http://cornell.worldcat.org/advancedsearch] or Ask a Librarian [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/ask]. Learn more by going to "Finding and Evaluating Sources."

Q: How do I find an article if it's not in the database in full text?
A: For information about locating materials, please see "Finding and Evaluating Sources."

Q: How do I find an article I saw listed in a bibliography?
A: See "Finding and Evaluating Sources." For information about locating books and articles, please see "Finding and Evaluating Sources."

Q: How do I get the full text of an article?
A: There are several ways to get to full-text articles. Please see "Getting Material" [link to http://digitalliteracy.cornell.edu/tutorial/dpl3210.html] for more information.

Q: If a book is available off campus, can I get it?
A: Through the library's interlibrary loan and other borrowing services, you can get almost anything from anywhere without charge. In addition, the library is involved in a number of initiatives to make more articles and research available to you online for free.

Q: How do I get a book if Cornell doesn't have it?
A: Through the library's interlibrary loan and other borrowing services (for example, Borrow Direct [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/svcs/borrow/bordir]), you can get almost anything from anywhere without charge. In addition, the library is involved in a number of initiatives [link to http://www.library.cornell.edu/svcs/serve/scholarly] to make more articles and research available to you online for free.

Q: What makes an article "scholarly"?
A: For information about determining whether an article would be considered scholarly, please see "Evaluating Sources."

Q: What does it mean to say that an article is "peer-reviewed" or "refereed"?
A: For information about determining whether an article is peer-reviewed, please see "Evaluating Sources."

Q: What's the difference between "primary" and "secondary" research?
A: For information about how to determine whether a source should be considered primary or secondary, please see "Evaluating Sources."