

Researching incorporates gathering information on a topic, assessing what you find, and then presenting it in your own writing, in a clear and logical manner. Undertaking academic research for the first time can be a daunting and overwhelming process. However, if you know how and where to find appropriate resources, how to assess and organise them, stay within the boundaries of your topic, and have a good plan for your writing, you can be successful.

Three things to keep in mind

1. Learn what plagiarism is and how to avoid it (go [here](#)).
2. Get to know your library and the librarians - they are the experts and are there to help you.
3. Keep your resources organised so you can find the information easily.

Finding resources

Define what you need to know

Consider the following research topic. *Do good leadership qualities derive from genetics or the environment?*

From this question you can write a sentence that describes what you will be looking for. *I am looking for literature and data that focus on leadership qualities that are influenced by both genetics and the environment.*

Use this statement to choose key words and key phrases. These terms will become the key for searching catalogues, databases and search engines for information about your subject. Add definitions to help with the literature search

- Leadership qualities (management, administration)
- Genetics (nature, heredity)
- Environment (nurture, surroundings, workplace)

Using these combinations of search terms you can search websites, online databases, and libraries for books and documents that may be suitable for your research.

Websites

The Internet can provide an enormous wealth of resources, but it can also overwhelm you with too much information and it is hard to know what is relevant or credible.

[Wikipedia](#) is a good place to get an overview by using keywords related to your topic, following links and recommended resources. However, use it only to start getting your head around the topic - **do not** cite it as a source in your writing.

[Google Scholar](#) is a very well known search engine that is used especially for academic research. If you cannot get access to the full document you can use the reference to locate it through the online databases offered by The Robertson Library.

[Microsoft](#) have also developed their own academic search engine.

Databases

The Robertson Library has electronic databases that you can search online. These databases hold lists of articles, reviews, and scientific results published in academic journals worldwide. Once you find a document you can usually download it immediately or have the library order it for you. These databases are usually grouped in subject areas.

Libraries

Libraries have changed a lot over the last few years, being able to take advantage of all the latest technologies. The Robertson Library should be the first place you visit if you need help with your research. The librarians are extensively trained in research skills, extremely knowledgeable (and friendly), and will be able to suggest places to search, and search terms that you have not thought about.

Searching websites and databases

To be efficient when searching for online resources it is important to know some basic search functions and how Boolean operators work.

Use key words

List key words that define your topic – these will become your main search terms. Be as specific as possible.

Use quotation marks for exact phrases

“leadership qualities” will result in web pages where that exact phrase appears. There will be fewer sites than if you just typed in the two words - *leadership qualities*.

Boolean searching.

Use + (and) and – (not) to narrow your search.

(Use + or **AND** to include all words or phrases)

“leadership qualities” +business or “leadership qualities” AND business

Note - Google uses AND as a default Boolean operator between every word unless they are within quotation marks.

(Use – or **NOT** to exclude words you do not want)

“leadership qualities” –boss or “leadership qualities” NOT boss

Important – do not use a space between the + and – signs and the search term

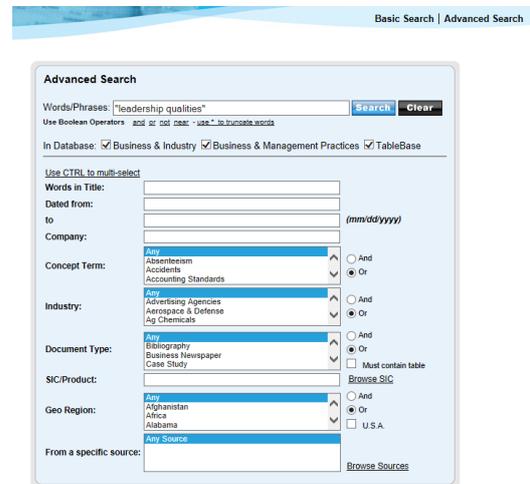
e.g. -boss not - boss

OR allows you to search for more than one term. **OR** requires at least one of the terms joined by it to appear somewhere in the document, in any order.

leadership OR management OR governance +business

The more words you enter connected by **OR**, the more documents you get. The **OR** operator is generally used to join words or phrases that have a similar meaning or concept.

Most search engines and databases have an advanced search button that can be used to refine your search by date, country, type of document, language, etc.



For great database searching tips go [HERE](#)

Using CTRL+F

If you have found a webpage or document that may be useful you can search within it for your key words or phrases. With the page or document open press CTRL+F to open the FIND box. Enter the word or phrase and press ENTER. Follow your instincts from here as different programs provide different options.

Using bibliographies

When you find an article or book that matches your own topic examine the bibliography or reference list at the end. The author's references are a goldmine of sources for your own research.

Assessing resources

Unfortunately, not everything you find will be appropriate to use as it may not possess academic credibility, may not be completely unbiased, nor stay within the boundaries of your topic. Being able to evaluate sources is an important skill to develop. Choosing good sources means paying attention to who wrote the information, and why and when it was written.

Evaluating books and journal articles.

Ask yourself the following questions when evaluating books and journal articles.

1. Does the content specifically address the topic of my research?
2. Is the author reputable? e.g. university based or from a research institution?
3. Does the reference list or bibliography appear comprehensive in its coverage?
4. Is the information presented still valid and applicable today?
5. Is the content of the source fact, opinion, or propaganda?

Evaluating web sites

Ask yourself the following questions when evaluating information from a web site.

1. How did you find the page? Was it from a general search or from a site like Google Scholar? Was it a link from a reputable site, or cited in a scholarly or credible source?
2. What is the site's domain? If the source is from an .edu website it is from a school and should be credible. If it has a .com address the site is from a company and may be more interested in selling you something. What is the authority of the page? Is the author's name visible? Is the author connected to an organization or institution? Does the author list his or her qualifications?
3. Is the information accurate and objective? Are sources of facts or statistics cited? Is there a reason the site is presenting a particular point of view on a topic?
4. Is the page current? When was the page created? Are dates included for the last update of the page?



For more information on evaluating web sites go [HERE](#)

Organising resources

It is very important that you have a system for organising the many references that you find while researching. It is annoying when you want to include a quote or idea in your writing and you cannot remember where you read it. Using a pen and paper system has been around a long time and may still work for you. However, there are many good computer programs that are wonderful for organising everything you find.

Using pen and paper

There are two main methods using pen and paper.

1. Creating index cards filed under a system of your choosing - by author, topic, key word, etc.

Example of an index card for organising references

General
leadership
qualities

Jones
(2011, p.3)

Good examples of
environmental influences.
Too light on proof

2. Creating a summary table where you can write down authors, dates, relevance, notes, and even brief summaries.

Example of a table for organising references

| Author / Date | Topic / Focus | Concept | Context / Setting | Findings |
|---------------|---------------|---------|-------------------|----------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

 To watch a video on how to create a summary table go [HERE](#)

Using a computer program

Using a computer program to organise everything makes retrieving information very easy. You may have to spend some time learning how but the rewards are worth it. These programs can let you store, and search, authors, titles, dates, key words, full references, and any other information you can think of. You can make notes or summaries and even link to the whole document if you have it stored somewhere.

One popular free program is Zotero.



To download Zotero go [HERE](#)

 To learn how to use Zotero go [HERE](#)

Whatever method you use, make sure that every quote, fact, and thought is linked in some way to its source. This will make it easier to insert references while you are writing.



For more information on developing research skills go [HERE](#)



To practise research skills online go [HERE](#)