IHS Literature and the Arts
Research: Where do I begin?
*adopted from OWL Purdue

We live in an age overflowing with sources of information. With so many information sources at our fingertips, knowing where to start, sorting through it all and finding what we want can be overwhelming!

Before you begin your research, you should ask yourself some questions. These will help narrow your search parameters.

What kind of information are you looking for?

Do you want facts? Opinions? News reports? Research studies? Analyses? Personal reflections? History?

Where would be a likely place to look?

Which sources are likely to be most useful to you? Libraries? The Internet? Academic periodicals? Newspapers? Government records?

How much information do you need?

How many sources of information are you looking for? Do you need to view both sides of the issue?

Online vs. Print Publications

An important distinction when doing research is the difference between traditional publications and Internet resources. The Internet may be the most convenient place to begin your research, but it is not always the best.

Internet Sources: Anything published exclusively online in a variety of digital formats. Material includes: web pages, PDF documents, ebooks, multimedia.

Traditional Publications: This includes anything that has been published in print form and is widely available at libraries and bookstores. Material includes: books, textbooks, newspapers, popular and scholarly journals, and magazines.

With the advent of new technologies, many traditional resources are now available online (including newspaper articles, magazines, book chapters, and journal articles). Pay careful attention to whether the source you have found is an online-only source or if it has a print component as well.

Types of Sources

Traditional print sources

Books and Textbooks: Books present a multitude of topics. Because of the time it takes to publish a book, books usually contain more dated information than will be found in journals and newspapers.

Newspapers: Predominately covering the latest events and trends, newspapers contain very up-to-date information. Newspapers report both information that is factual in nature and also share opinions. Generally, however, they will not take a "big picture" approach or contain information about larger trends.

Academic and Trade Journals: Academic and trade journals are where to find the most up-to-date information and research in industry, business, and academia. Journal articles come in several forms, including literature reviews that overview current and past research, articles on theories and history, or articles on specific processes or research.

Government Reports and Legal Documents: The government releases information intended for its own use or for public use. These types of documents can be an excellent source of information. An example of a government report is the U.S. Census data. Most government reports and legal documents can now be accessed online.

Press Releases and Advertising: Companies and special interest groups produce texts to help persuade readers to act in some way or inform the public about some new development

Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets: While some flyers or pamphlets are created by reputable sources, because of the ease in which they are created, many less-than-reputable sources also produce these. They are useful for quick reference or very general information.

Multimedia: Printed material is certainly not the only option for finding research. Also consider media sources such as radio and television broadcasts, interactive talks, and public meetings.

Internet-only sources

Web sites: Most of the information on the Internet is distributed via Web sites. Web sites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources.

Weblogs / Blogs: A rather recent development in Web technology, weblogs or blogs are a type of interactive journal where writers post and readers respond. They vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources. For example, many prestigious journalists and public figures may have blogs, which may be more credible of a blog than most.

Message boards, Discussion lists, and Chat rooms: Discussion lists, chat rooms, and message boards exist for all kinds of disciplines both in and outside of the university. However, plenty of boards exist that are rather unhelpful and poorly researched.

Multimedia: The Internet has a multitude of multimedia resources including online broadcasts and news, images, audio files, and interactive Web sites.

Primary Research

Research isn't limited to published material that can be found on the Internet or at the library. If you are working on writing about a problem local to your school or community, you may need to conduct primary research. You may be able to find secondary sources (such as those found at the library or online) on the more general topic you are pursuing, but may not find specifics on your school or town. To supplement this lack of sources, you can collect data on your own.

Many different types of primary research exist. Some common ones used for writing classes include:

- Interviews: A conversation between two or more people in which one person (the interviewer) asks a series of questions to another person or persons (the interviewee).
- Surveys and questionnaires: A process of gathering specific information from people in a systematic way with a set series of questions. Survey questions usually have pre-specified or short responses.
- Observations: Careful viewing and documenting of the world around you.