

Introduction to Library Research

Welcome to the Lloyd Sealy Library! This handout is designed to give you an outline of library resources available as well as tips on conducting research. In addition to books, databases and subject guides don't forget to make use of additional resources available from the library including your librarians who are available in person, on the phone, and through both email and texting!

Books

When you are looking for a book on whatever topic you are researching, your first step should be to take a look in CUNY+, the online catalog of the City University Libraries. There is an immense collection available to you, both of physical books and of online e-books. The key to searching and finding books that are available in the Lloyd Sealy collection is to understand the information that is presented to you when you conduct a search in CUNY+. The most important information is finding out the **Call Number** of the book. The call number represents the shelf location of the item in the library collection. After that the only thing left is to figure out if the book is still here or if it has been checked out; when looking in CUNY+, if the book is listed as "**Look on Shelf**" then it has not been taken out. If there is a date listed instead of "Look on Shelf" then someone has beaten you to the book.

1 First, find the book's general location and call number on CUNY+:

Library	Location	Call number	Description	Item status	Due date	Due hour
John Jay College	Stacks	PQ7797.B635 1984		Regular Loan	Look On Shelf	

Book can be borrowed & is available if not on Reserve

2 Then find the book on the shelves by its call number:

Stacks	See floor map to find shelf section.
PQ	Find Ps, then find PQ alphabetically.
7797	In the PQs, find 7,797. Read as a whole number.
.B635	Find the Bs in the PQ7797 area, then 635 in digit order. The number is a decimal: .B6 occurs after .B599. May be two-part.
1984	Years are arranged chronologically.

Search Engines

The first instinct of most someone who is unfamiliar with conducting research in an academic environment is to turn primarily to Google and Wikipedia. That is a problematic way to begin your research for a variety of reasons including: Google searches tend to produce an avalanche of results with a lot of material being inappropriate for academic purposes, Wikipedia is both not accepted by professors as a valid source and can be both inaccurate and unreliable especially on controversial subjects. As a researcher you must consider if the information you are finding is reliable, valid, authoritative, relevant and current.

Evaluating Sources

Scholarly journals are publications that publish original research articles written by scholars and researchers. **Peer Reviewed articles** (also referred to as Scholarly) are materials that go through a process called "peer review" before being published. Scholars in the field evaluate the submitted manuscript material for originality, veracity & plausibility and recommend, or not, that the research be published. **Non-Scholarly articles** include news and entertainment stories usually written by journalists. The general characteristics of a scholarly journal article may include: starting with an **abstract** or summary, having a **bibliography** or list of references at the end, and **cite** articles/books in the text. The **tone** of the article will tend to be restrained and serious while the topic will be focused and explored in depth.

Databases

There are a variety of databases available from the Library. Of those databases, many of them cover a wide range of subjects. Also while your first instinct may be to limit your researching to databases that deal specifically or mostly with your subject, it is worthwhile to look beyond that to databases that cover similar topics from different angles. So for instance while you may be interested in the Criminal Justice angle concerning the question of guns, it may be useful to look in a sociology or political science database that would cover the same topic but from a different viewpoint. Below is a list of databases that can be helpful when searching for research materials:

Academic Search Complete: This database is a general one meaning that it covers a wide variety of topics and subjects. If you are not sure where to start looking for material whenever you are beginning research on a paper of any topic, start here.

Criminal Justice Periodicals Index: This is the primary criminal justice database to begin with. It covers national and international topics from 1980 onward.

CQ Press Electronic Library: This database is the definitive reference resource for research in American government, politics, history, public policy, and current affairs. If you need information from a political science oriented direction, take a look here.

Gale Virtual Reference Library: This database is a collection of encyclopedias. It is your scholarly research substitute for Wikipedia.

JStor: This is one of the most popular databases available overall with students. All articles available in this database are scholarly materials. Be aware though that most of the articles here are very long so if you are working on a short paper it may not be worthwhile to search here.

Lexis-Nexis: This database covers legal materials and newspapers. If you are looking for a specific law or case, or you need a newspaper article (especially New York Times articles), this database is one you should take a look at.

PsycInfo: This database is the most comprehensive index and access to materials in psychology available.

SocIndex with Full Text: This database is one of the most heavily used sociology databases available from the library. It has an interface that is very similar to the one in Academic Search Complete.

Search Terms

Most library databases are best searched using **Boolean** searching. In a Boolean search, you choose words that best describe your topic and then connect them using either **AND**, **OR** or **NOT**. Here are some examples of Boolean searches:

Corpses **AND** insects – this retrieves information containing both words

Corpses **OR** cadavers – this retrieves information containing either word

Insects **NOT** beetles – this will retrieve information about insects but exclude information about beetles

You can even mix and match terms in a Boolean search:

(Corpses OR cadavers) AND insects – this will retrieve information containing the word insects as well as either the word corpses or the word cadavers

Now you might be wondering, how do I come up with keywords to use in my search? The answer is to narrow down your topic until you have a single research question your paper will explore. Then identify the main concepts in that question. Use those concepts as your search terms/keywords.

Subject Guides

The librarians here at the Lloyd Sealy Library work very hard to make sure that students have access to reputable and valid forms of information so that conducting research can be a breeze. As part of that effort, all librarians put together Subject Guides, also referred to as Libguides, that are portals to high quality research information. Before you consider turning to a long and perhaps fruitless search on Google or Wikipedia take a look at the Libguides we have available through the library website. The link for the main Libguides page is: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/>

Citing Sources

Citation is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the action of citing or quoting any words or written passage, quotation”. In plain English that means that if you use an article or book for your research or quote something that someone else said in your paper then you must list where you got it from. Proper citation is critical to good academic research. It is also an important step in avoiding **Plagiarism**. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Plagiarism as “the action or practice of taking someone else’s work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one’s own”. In other words it is stealing and cheating by trying to pass off someone else’s idea as something you came up with on your own. Please remember to be careful and cite all the sources you use in your paper. We have handouts that specifically deal with how to cite material in a variety of formats properly. They can be found online at: http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/citing_sources/

Annotated Bibliography

A **bibliography** is the list of sources and other materials that you used when researching your topic. It usually consists of books, journals, periodicals, web sites, videos, etc. Anything that you read/watched and used in your paper should be part of your bibliography. An **annotation** is a note of explanation or comment added to a text or diagram. In the case of an annotated bibliography it is a summary and/or evaluation of the bibliographic source, usually not exceeding about one paragraph though in some cases an annotation can run several pages. An annotation to a bibliographic citation can do one or more of three things: **summarize** (what are the main arguments), **assess** (is it a useful source), and **reflect** (was this source helpful).

Literature Review

A literature review is essentially a review of published material on a chosen topic or subject. It is intended to analyze previous research in an in-depth manner. The material that will be examined in a literature review varies depending on the subject but will usually include books, journal and newspaper articles as well as dissertations. A good literature review should ultimately be a guide for its audience, giving an introduction to what has been written in the chosen subject and giving them a solid idea about what extent and limits of the research that has been done so far.

When you begin to work on your literature review, keep in mind the following ideas:

- What question and/or problem are you trying to answer? What is the thesis you are trying to prove?
- Are you being specific about your topic? Is it too broad? And if it is can you narrow it down?
- What does the literature say about your topic? Is there agreement or disagreement on the subject?

Related links

Library Website: <http://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/>

Statistics: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/statistics/>

English 101: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/eng101/>

Primary Sources: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/primary/>

Citing Resources: http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/citing_sources

How to Use the Library: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/LibraryIntro/>

Evaluating Resources: <http://guides.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/evaluatingresources>

