Library Chapter for Gateways Class

Introduction

What's a library for? A university library exists to collect, organize, and provide access to information necessary for scholars to do their work. While a student you will wear many different hats, and one of those hats is scholar-in-training.

What is a scholar? Referring to someone as a scholar, or dreaming of becoming a scholar as a profession, is uncommon. The closest approximation might be aspiring to be a professor, scientist, or researcher. The goal of a scholar is to develop a body of practices and principles to create trustworthy information. Scholars expand the body of knowledge in their chosen discipline. All professions have scholarship and scholars, as do the arts, humanities, and sciences. They call the body of work they do scholarship.

What is scholarship? Scholarship strives for accuracy above all. In order to create the most trustworthy knowledge possible, scholars rely on evidence to support their assertions and arguments. Not only do they rely on evidence, but they insist on sharing their evidence so everyone will know how they reached their conclusions. (This is known as citing your sources.) Scholars constantly analyze each other’s work for errors through the peer review process. By asking others to locate errors in your work and point them out, the work (or body of scholarship) is improved.

What does a librarian do? Academic librarians collect, organize, and provide access to the evidence and information necessary for scholars to do their research work. Since organizing all this information is moderately complex we teach people how to understand the organization and how to utilize the access points (like catalogs and databases). Much of the work librarians do is hidden behind the scenes. Our more public face engages in teaching people how to effectively access high quality information to be used in research.

What is research? Research is learning. Secondary research is learning the background, history, and current state of a topic or discipline. Primary research is answering original research questions to expand the body of knowledge within a discipline or profession. Academic libraries exist to support all kinds of research.
Introduction to Research

The Topic

Getting started can sometimes be the most difficult part of your assignment. It is important to remain flexible in the early stages of selecting a topic/research question. It is likely you will need to adjust your initial topic/research question as you do your preliminary research.

- **Understand the parameters of the assignment.** Consider the types and amounts of sources needed, the importance of currency to your topic, should point of view sources be included, etc.
- **Choose a topic** you find inherently interesting, the implications of which present a reasonable problem which your research will address.
- **Find topic ideas** in subject specific encyclopedias, newspapers, even Internet sources (just keep in mind these are not sources to cite in your paper but a starting place to spark curiosity).
- **Reflect** on your topic and brainstorm: What makes your topic significant and worthy of researching? Think about important concepts, terminology, and prominent people. Break it down into different aspects.
- **Refining the topic.** This step involves taking a broad topic and focusing the scope of your question to one or two manageable facets. This can be done by limiting your focus to a specific time period, demographic population and geographic location, or to what the implications may be in economic, social, cultural, or political terms, etc.
- **Broadening the topic.** Sometimes the idea for your paper will be too narrow. If you are having trouble locating research as specific as you need, expand the scope of your research. For example, broadening your topic to South America generally instead of Argentina specifically may increase your ability to retrieve relevant books and articles.

Research Questions

The research question and thesis statement are closely aligned. Often your thesis statement will be the brief answer to your research question. The difference between research and opinion is that research is meant to describe the natural world, while opinion is meant to persuade. Research relies on evidence and a non-self-contradictory argument. Opinion relies on evidence as well as other persuasive techniques. Don’t settle for simply asking who, what, where, when, why, & how. Dig deeper. Ask more complex questions. Ask questions that begin with should/shall, could/can, would/will, is/are, which, whose, etc.

- **Challenge yourself** by asking complex questions. For example, don’t ask if the US needs more or less gun control, instead ask How does firearm violence affect different communities (rural and urban, black and white, rich and poor, etc.).
- **Ask open ended** questions that start with ‘why’ and ‘how’ which tend to require complex answers.
• Evaluate your questions. Why is the answer to your question significant? What problem does it address? What are the implications or consequences? Why should your readers care? What original contribution does this research make to existing scholarship?

• Be a part of the greater scholarly conversation. Don’t feel you need to solve major problems in the limited scope of your research paper. Aim to offer a solution to a small part of a bigger issue.

Search for Information

• Always be looking for new search terms. Finding synonyms for your research topic is an important part of your early research. Always be looking for new vocabulary, jargon, and synonyms. Remember that people’s names can be excellent research terms. Keep track of names of experts.

• The research process is iterative. Keep searching in the same databases with slightly different search terms. If you find yourself getting frustrated find another way to come at your research problem.

• Research involves reading. Read. The deeper your comprehension, and the broader your reading, the better your research.

Using Books

• Look for books in the Online Catalog located under Resources on the library’s homepage.

• Books are typically more comprehensive or broad in their treatment of a topic than scholarly articles which tend to be more specific. While the entirety of a book may not be relevant to your research check the Table of Contents and Index using key terms and concepts.

• Follow bibliographic trails by using the citations or bibliography in a book can be used to locate more books or articles.

• Browse the shelf. Academic libraries use the Library of Congress Classification System. This alphanumeric organization clusters similar materials together. The perfect book may be on the shelf so take a moment to look around.

• Use books located in the Reference Section of the library as well as books in the Main Collection.

Scholarly Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Scholarly publications are written by and for scholars, subject to peer review prior to publication, use discipline specific jargon, are free of advertising, and provide extensive citations. For these reasons they are considered to be authoritative and reliable. Keep your search as clear and concise as possible.

• Log in to Esearch and search for Scholarly Peer Reviewed journal articles through the library's online databases. (Your Esearch username and password is the same as your Spartans Domain username and password)
• Academic Search Complete and ProQuest are comprehensive multidisciplinary databases. Check the "scholarly peer review" limiter to ensure your results are retrieved from only scholarly journal sources.

• JSTOR is another excellent multidisciplinary database with only scholarly materials. JSTOR also has primary source collections.

• The library also has many subject specific databases. Check the library's Subject Guides to find which databases may be most appropriate for your research topic.

The Ethics of Research

• It is better to cite too often than not enough.

• Research is a collaboration that takes place across time and space. A citation is like an old-fashioned hyperlink that you use to source your ideas and evidence. Citations allow your readers to see the more elaborate versions of what you are referring to in your work. Citations show where the evidence you are using is located, so others can find it.

• Cite your sources. Style Manuals (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) are available on reserve at the Circulation Desk. Use RefWorks to export your citations. Many Databases have a citation feature. Be sure to double check these for accuracy! The Online Writing Lab (OWL) from Purdue offers excellent guides complete with sample papers and sample Works Cited pages.

• Not citing your sources is known as plagiarism. Do not plagiarise. There are serious academic penalties for not properly citing your sources.

Tips and Tricks

• Use quotation marks when searching a phrase.

• Most databases do not catch misspellings. Spelling counts.

• Use the name of researchers as keywords in your search terms.

• Talk to a librarian at the beginning of your research and ask what resources the librarian recommends.

• Check the library’s Blog. We often answer student’s reference questions on the blog. http://utlibrary.wordpress.com/

• Use the library’s Subject Guides (under Collections) and Research Guides (link on the bottom right of the homepage) for help in finding databases and web resources specific to your topic.

• Read this post on the difference between scholarly journals and popular magazines. http://utlibrary.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/the-difference-between-a-journal-and-a-magazine/

• Watch these videos on how to improve your studying. http://utlibrary.wordpress.com/2012/02/09/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-studying/

• Talk to your professor. For example: There is sometimes confusion about using resources from the databases because, technically, they are “on the Internet.” Most of the scholarly articles in databases originally appeared in print, but have been digitized for convenience. If you are expected to avoid getting materials from “the Internet” double-check to make sure using articles from databases is acceptable.
Conclusion

Email: library@ut.edu

Phone: 813-253-6231

Library website: http://utopia.ut.edu/

Library hours: http://utopia.ut.edu/hours.htm

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/universityoftampalibrary

Macdonald-Kelce Library blog: http://utlibrary.wordpress.com/

Librarians: During the academic year the Reference Desk is staffed Monday-Thursday 8am-9pm, Friday 8am-5pm, Saturday 10am-6pm, and Sunday 1-9pm. You can find librarian email addresses on the library’s staff webpage: http://utopia.ut.edu/staff.htm

Learn more about research at http://libguides.utopia.ut.edu/researchintroduction