Introduction to Research at the Macdonald-Kelce Library at The University of Tampa

By David Davisson

(The following is a transcript of the presentation I give to the AWR201 classes before they start their major research project.)

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Hi, I’m David Davisson, Information Literacy Librarian at the Macdonald-Kelce Library at The University of Tampa. Over the course of these videos I’m going to talk about why your professors will often ask you to use scholarship for your research, and how to use the library resources to get peer-reviewed academic articles.

I’m going to start with a brief description of scholarship, then I’ll talk about using and finding suitable books, using the library’s databases to get scholarly research articles, the value of citations and how to use them to locate research, then I’ll talk about some resources on the open internet that will be useful.

What is scholarship?

By this point we’ve all heard of fake news. There is national debate about what is and what isn’t fake news, what is the difference between news and opinion, and how can we prevent fake news.

Scholars have been dealing with the problem of fake scholarship for centuries, and have created a variety of methods to reduce the likelihood of fake scholarship. The academic journal, peer review, and the use of citations are all elements put into place to reduce the possibility of fake scholarship and increase the quality of information available to scholars.
One reason your professors will often ask you to use scholarly resources rather than information you might find on the open internet is because of the effort scientists, researchers, and scholars put into creating a high-quality information resource.

Before we go any farther let me take a moment to define scholars. Scholars are a group of people who work very seriously and very diligently to create a high-quality body of knowledge about their chosen discipline or field. Now, it’s probably obvious that certain fields are reliant on scholarship—psychology, biology, marketing, sociology, criminology, history, etc. But, there are a couple of things to keep in mind about the breadth of scholarship.

First, nearly everything has a scholarship. How to effectively help employees in a human resources department has scholarship, how to best plan for retirement has scholarship, how to improve your chances at romantic happiness has scholarship. Nearly everything has scholarship. For nearly every aspect of your life there are a group of people working diligently and seriously to create a high-quality body of knowledge.

While it’s not often explicitly stated, one of the reasons you are tasked with utilizing scholarly research in your papers is not so that you will become a great paper writer, though your professors hope that’s part of what you learn, but so you will be exposed to high-quality information, and through this exposure become better at evaluating information you come across in your daily life.

The second thing to keep in mind about the breadth of scholarship is that broad areas of scholarship tend not to overlap. Historians use the historical method, and your history professor might not want you using law reviews for your research. Law students focus on law reviews and your professor might not want you using social science research. Your social science professors might not want to see a lot of history research, and your journalism professors want you to reach out to live human beings and
It turns out scholarship is ridiculously expensive and is often not available on the open internet. Some of you have had the experience of searching for an academic article on the internet, finding something useful, only to get a page that asks you to pay $35, or $50, or $65 to access the full article. Don’t pay. That’s what the library is for. We have access to most of that material, and what we don’t we can obtain through Interlibrary Loan.

The first step in uncovering scholarly information is to turn to the library’s front page at utopia.ut.edu. The most important link on this page is Esearch. Esearch is a password protection page that allows you access to the library’s collection of databases, online reference, and ebooks. If you are in the library and having trouble with your password you can still access much of this material by using the databases link. I recommend always logging into Esearch first. It helps facilitate access for some of the methods we’ll be using later.

THREE STEPS OF RESEARCH

When I work on research project I typically work through the following three steps. I don’t go step one, two, three, and then I’m done. Instead, I move between steps, maybe starting with 1 then to 2 then back to 1 then to 3, etc. Though I typically move through them in the following order.

STEP ONE: THE INTERNET AND WIKIPEDIA

Like everybody else living in the twenty-first century I start my research on the internet. I even use Wikipedia. Rarely will I use any of this information in my paper. I will never use Wikipedia to cite in my paper (if you need basic reference information use the resources available at Oxford Reference or Gale Reference located in the library’s list of databases).
What I’m looking for when I’m on the internet is background, context, ideas about my topic, current controversy about my topic, and especially new terms. Since I know the language used by experts is often not the language I might use to talk about a subject I pay particularly close attention to specialized language, jargon, unique terms, and people’s names. Keep in mind that people’s names, especially if they are an expert in the field, can often be useful as a search term.

**STEP TWO: BOOKS**

Before I discuss articles and databases I want to talk about using books for your research. Don’t forget the books. We live in a world where it seems like every information need can be met through our phones or computers accessing the internet. Unfortunately, most scholarship is not available on the open internet. Scholars have been using books for centuries to collect and distribute the most up-to-date information in their field. If you can find a current high-quality book on your area of research it can do a lot of your work for you. It can give you the background, language, key figures, unresolved questions, and a history of the subject.

Eventually you will learn the best publishers for your field or discipline. For the time being, remember that a book published by a university press, and it doesn’t matter if it’s the University of Kansas or Oxford University, exist to publish scholarly material. If you find a book from a university press there is a great likelihood that is the sort of material your professor is looking for. However, keep in mind that there are scores of publishers dedicated to scholarly and academic materials that are not associated with specific universities (Wiley, Sage, and Springer, to name a few).

To find a book at the Macdonald-Kelce Library use the online catalog.

Keep in mind that while this search box looks like a Google search box it should not be treated the same way. The search box for an internet search engine like Google or Bing or Duck Duck Go does something substantially different than what a search box for a database does. For an internet search
engine we can use many words, then subtract or add words to improve our search results. To be an effective user of the databases use a few words then use the tools provided by the database to expand or narrow your results.

You can also put quotation marks around words to create a search phrase. The quotation mark trick works across most databases and in Google, and causes the search engine to see what’s inside the quotation marks as a single term, instead of multiple words. This is particularly effective when you are working with common words or names.

For our example today let’s say we want to reduce the amount of plastic that gets into the ocean. So, our first search might be ‘ocean’ and ‘plastic’ or maybe even “water pollution.”

One of the first hurdles for many of you will be locating the right search terms. The language you and I use to talk about a topic may not be the language experts use to talk about the same subject. For example – We all know what the death penalty is. We have an opinion about the death penalty, and we can explain it to someone else. However, when you start researching the death penalty you quickly realize that people who write and research on this topic write about capital punishment. That means there are articles, research, and statistics that never mention the words death or penalty. You are going to see similar situations time and time again as you are beginning a new line of research.

So, it may turn out that plastic and ocean are not the best terms. But, we have to start somewhere.

The first things to notice about these results are the variety of materials available, the dates of their publication, and the relevance. For the purposes of this demonstration we want to find a book we can check out of the library.
In this results list we have a combination of Government Documents (including Government Documents on the internet), books available for checkout, and even a DVD. While Government Documents are essential for some types of research, they are often not what your professor is looking for when they ask for peer-reviewed, or academic research. Government documents are a tremendous resource for statistics, especially when it comes to criminology, ecology, local, national, and global economics, education, etc. But, the government resources are typically not a form of original research.

One of the most useful tools in the online catalog is the Quick Limit. For this example I’m going to limit my search to Main Collection. Eventually you’ll probably also want to double-check the Reference Collection to check for specialized encyclopedias, handbooks, and dictionaries on your subject.

Now we have a book titled Plastic Ocean at the top of the list. This book was second on the list in the previous results.

From this result we have the publication date and the location in the library, but let me recommend always taking a moment to click on the title and see what kind of information is held on the item record. Some of the information from the results list is repeated here: the date, the location, and whether it is on the shelf or checked out.

To locate books in the library use the Call Number. We don’t have sections like a book store has sections, but we try to organize our books so that similar topics are clustered together. So, even if this was a record for a book that was old, or checked out, I’d still go to where it’s supposed to be located on the shelf because that’s where we keep that kind of stuff. Keep in mind that you’ll probably find two or three clusters in the collection useful for your research.

Also, on databases pay attention to buttons or tabs near the top. We know from research that people often don’t scroll on webpages, so web designers, and database designers, try to squeeze a lot of
information into the top of the screen. For example, I always look for something like the bibliographic
button here that provides us with subject header links. Sometimes the subject headers won’t be of
much use, but sometimes they provide me with new language, and sometimes they give me a link I can
use to quickly get to the useful material available in this database.

So, in this example, I can choose Marine Pollution, and on the results page I can sort by date to
get something recent. This is another example of what I mean by using the tools available on the
database rather than over-relying on the search box.

If there is a book you want or need that is not in our collection you can typically obtain it
through interlibrary loan. See the video that covers resources on the open internet, or look for the step-
by-step guide to using interlibrary loan on the library’s “Introduction to Research” research guide.

If there is a book you want or need that is not in our collection we can often obtain it from
another library. Use the library’s interlibrary loan form on the library’s front page. Keep in mind that
because of licensing reasons we cannot interlibrary loan electronic books, so the book you are
requesting will be a physical, tangible object coming through the mail. Arrival times vary, but a good rule
of thumb is seven to ten days after placing your request. You may also interlibrary loan articles that are
not in the library’s possession.

Remember, too, that interlibrary loan, and the library, are here to satisfy your intellectual
curiosity. Your use of our services does not have to be tied to a research project or a class assignment. If
you are interested in a subject, use the library to find out more.

STEP THREE: ARTICLES AND DATABASES

Quite often you’ll be tasked with locating peer-reviewed, academic articles. Note that your
professors may use the terms peer-reviewed, academic, scholarly, research, and refereed roughly
interchangeably. They all mean slightly different things, but typically it means your professor wants you to find high-quality information created by scholars in the field you are writing about or researching.

Most often you’ll find scholarly academic articles in the list of databases you find after logging into Esearch. To find a more targeted list of databases use the library’s Subject Guides link to sort the databases by subject. Or, check with a librarian at the reference desk for suggestions for the best databases to use for the topic you’re researching.

For this example I’m going to use the database ProQuest. ProQuest is a good database to start with for many projects. It covers a lot of territory and is excellent for social science research.

I’ll continue searching for ocean and plastic, but remember to always be looking for alternative language and potential new search terms.

One of the things that makes this database in particular so comprehensive is that it includes newspapers, magazines, ebooks, and other information resources in addition to scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. Sometimes you might need magazine articles, or newspaper articles instead of peer-reviewed articles, but for this presentation I’m going to use this checkbox to restrict my results to only those items which are peer-reviewed.

ProQuest and a few other databases have an option to restrict your search to full-text articles only. And, while it’s tempting to use this function, let me suggest against it. We’ve dropped a widget into our databases called ‘360 link to full-text’ and identifiable by its green dot icon, which looks in all the other databases for the full-text of the article. It can be frustrating sometimes to work with databases that include only the abstract, and not the full-text, but look for the ‘360 link to full-text’ for help locating your article somewhere else. Also, if it’s a great article perfectly suitable for your research and we don’t have it in our database collection, you can still get the article through interlibrary loan. Interlibrary loan articles come through your email and generally take a couple of days to arrive.
It may be tempting at this point to grab the article and move on, but let me recommend always clicking on the title to see what is underneath.

Here for example, we see the phrase ‘plastic debris’ which might be a valuable new term to add to our list of search terms. Also, here you see the cite link. Most databases will have a link that says cite or citation which will give you a variety of citation styles for the article (including APA and MLA). One caveat – quite often these citations are incorrect. They are typically correct about the name of the journal, author, article title, etc., but are often formatted incorrectly. I strongly recommend using a resources like the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University for double-checking all of your citations.

**USING CITATIONS**

Once you find a scholarly article on your topic you can use it to uncover even more research.

One key element of scholarship is the citation. Students are told that they must use citations to avoid accusations of plagiarism. And, that is correct. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Don’t do it. However, there is a more significant reason citations play such an important role in scholarship.

For every fact, every statistic, every theory, every assertion the scholar needs to provide a source for that information. This allows the peers doing the peer review to double-check the work to correct for honest errors, or challenge differing interpretations, or locate mistakes. It also allows those building on that work to locate more research to inform their own inquiry.

Those citations are there for you to use. The citations serve as a roadmap to more research done on the topic the scholar is writing about.

One reason some of your professors are so adamant about getting your citations correct is because accurate citations are instrumental in creating a high-quality body of knowledge.
If the citation is for a book check the library’s online catalog. If it is not in our collection, you can request to borrow it through interlibrary loan.

If it is an article, search for the journal in Ejournals (be sure to check the date of the article against the date range available). If the library owns the journal you will find it through the Ejournals search. If the library owns the journal click on the appropriate link, then search for the title of the article (using the whole title, part of the title, keywords, or the name of the author). Through this process you should be able to locate the works the scholar used when writing the article you are reading.

If the article is a little dated and you would like to locate something more recent, take the article you are using and search for it in Google Scholar (scholar.google.com). Locate the article in the results and use the ‘cited by’ link underneath to search for scholarship that has used that article since it was published. (Google Scholar also has a ‘citation’ link that can be useful for generating MLA and APA citations; though always double-check those citations against authoritative sources like the Purdue University Online Writing Lab).

Through this process of following the network of information created by the citations you will soon have an idea of the work that has already been done to address your research question.

THE OPEN INTERNET

Here are some of my favorite sources on the open internet.

Wikipedia – Don’t be afraid to use Wikipedia. Remember that you will never cite Wikipedia. Instead, use it as a way to gain background knowledge and information on the issue you are researching.
Worldcat.org – This is the source I use to search for books. Worldcat.org is on the open internet and shows you what is in every library in North America. By using the links and sorting ability of this database I am able to broaden or narrow my search for useful, high-quality academic books.

Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (the OWL at Purdue) – I always double-check my citations against the style guides available at the OWL Purdue. It is an invaluable resource.

Google Scholar – To be an effective researcher it is essential to learn to use the databases effectively. However, adding Google Scholar to your set of tools can help when you’re having trouble gaining traction when starting your research. I am also a big fan of their ‘cited by’ function, and I use the ‘citations’ to get the first draft of my citations.

USA.gov – I turn to official government resources frequently when searching for statistics. If you are not sure which government agency holds the information you are looking for start at USA.gov.

Wolfram-Alpha – This is my go-to site for math, as well as a resource I check when collecting demographic information or information on nutrition.