

Finding the Best Resources for Your Studies



With a mobile phone or an iPad, it may feel as though all knowledge is at your fingertips, but there are so many other resources available offline that can enhance your studies.

To stand out from the crowd, and to demonstrate to your teachers that you have put in the legwork, you may want to consider some of the sources recommended in this handbook.

You will also be adopting good practices for the future, particularly if you decide to continue your studies after A-level.

Planning your research

Whether you are doing an Extended Research Project (EPQ) or simply researching for an A-level assignment, you will need to plan your research.

You will need to consider the sort of materials that you should read and the best way to find them as well as how you record your findings and communicate them to others.

In this handbook, you will find sections on:

1. Finding information sources
2. Using libraries
3. Free academic resources
4. Creating reading lists to demonstrate your reading.

Starting Out

Knowing which information is available at the planning stage is key to your success – too much and you could become bogged down and decide your question is too broad, too little and you might find you struggle to make the word count.

It is always a good idea if you are unfamiliar with a topic to use a good encyclopaedia or introductory text to gain an overview.

INFORMATION SOURCES

A quick guide for sixth-formers



Academic Texts

Great for background reading and written by experts. Look for clear evidence of research such as footnotes and source lists. Also, check for date of publication to ensure the information is up-to-date.



Journal Articles

Articles written by experts on very specific areas of research. Language can be quite technical so they are not for the faint-hearted. Essential for university level study.



News Sources

Up to the minute information, written to inform, entertain or persuade. Journalists gather their sources very quickly and have little time to check facts or acknowledge sources.



Web sites

Thousands of mind-boggling pages. Anyone can write a web page, so be sure to check who wrote it, when they wrote it and who they work for before using information from the internet.

Google Scholar

The scholarly bit of Google. Lots of free and not-so free journal articles. Good on the whole, but check out the authors to see if they are attached to a university or a well-respected organisation.

Wikipedia

One of the largest online encyclopedias in the world. Written by volunteers so anyone can contribute material. Some accuracy issues, but the references at the end of the articles act as a spring board for finding other sources.



Reports

Good for information about social policy, trends and current research. Check who commissioned them and why they did their research. Is there a hidden agenda?

Finding Sources

It is generally a good idea to use several different types of resources in your research – some will give you background information and others will bring your research up to date.

One starting point is Wikipedia however **check** any information that you find on Wikipedia against a more authoritative source to ensure its accuracy. You can do this, by looking at the sources at the end of a Wikipedia article. Remember Wikipedia articles can be written by **anyone**.

Generally, encyclopaedia articles are written to present facts rather than arguments and should not be cited (mentioned) in your research or included in the reading list at the end of your assignment.

Academic research is not about finding facts and regurgitating them, it is about analysing sources and reaching your own conclusions. You need to delve deeper than encyclopaedia articles and academic texts can provide the depth you need.

Much of the reading that you find in the **References** section at the end of a Wikipedia article can be followed up online, but others will refer to chapters in books or archives, which are not readily available via your phone or iPad. This is where understanding how to use a library comes in handy.

Using Libraries

It is important to understand how to find information in a library:

Step 1 - Search the Catalogue

You can search for specific books using the surname of the author and/or one or two words from the title. Alternatively, you can search using keywords to identify books on your topic.

Step 2 - Record the details

Write down the title and author and the classmark. Check the catalogue to see if the book is on loan.

Step 3 - Find your book

Find out where your book is located on the shelves. Note: There should be a library map or plan to help you.

There will also be numbers on the end of the shelves. Check the author and title to make sure you have the correct book. Books on the same subject, will have the same classmark so browse the books shelved next to yours.

Resources on your doorstep

You can borrow books to support your studies from your local public library. You will find these located in all the major towns in Kent.

They also have online resources including encyclopaedias, newspapers, statistics, study guides, and market research, which you can access too.

Canterbury Christ Church University Library and Learning Resources

HOW TO USE A LIBRARY

A beginners guide

Catalogue



A complete list of books, journals, DVDs, newspapers and other sources held by a library. Searchable and available online

Classification

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 0
* @ = + ÷
x - # ! &

The system used to organise the material. It often uses a combination of numbers and letters.. Like is stored with like.

Classmark



The number on the spine of the book. The number represents the subject, so all books on the same subject will have the same number.

Self-issue Machine/ Issue Desk



The place where you can borrow material if you have a library card.

Returns Machine/ Returns Desk



The place where you return the books and other materials when you have finished with them or when they are recalled for another library user.

Loan Period/ Due Date



The length of time you can have a book or other material and the date you must return it by.

Reservations



You can reserve a book that is on loan to someone else and you will be notified when it is returned.

Just Google it!

The internet is a fantastic resource but it's not the be all and end all! Anyone anywhere can publish online. The advantage of books is that they are usually checked by an **editor** prior to publication, but on the web anything goes.

Canterbury Christ Church University
Library and Learning Resources

HOW TO EVALUATE SOURCES

The CRAAP Test

Currency
 Is the information up to date? Does it reflect current research? Check the date of publication

Relevance
 Is the book about your topic? Or are you clutching at straws? Don't waste time reading material that isn't on topic

Authority
 Who wrote the information? Are they an expert in their field? Can you trust what they say? Do they explain or reference the information they use?

Accuracy
 How do you know if the information is accurate? Check it against other sources

Purpose
 Why did the author write the information? Are they trying to sell you something or impose their opinion? Are they biased?

It's important to look for CRAAP resources! (And, no that isn't a typo, but a handy mnemonic to help you evaluate information.)

For some subjects, like history, it is not so important that the information is up-to-date as long as the content is of good quality as opposed to subjects such as science where it is very important to use the most recent information that you can find!

You could be using poor quality, biased, out of date, incorrect information or simply find yourself overwhelmed with too much to read! The challenge is to sift through all the results to identify the information that is reliable and appropriate for your essay or project.

Also

Try **Google Scholar**, which has some freely available academic sources.

Subject Guides

Most university libraries have online guides recommending academic books, journals, databases and web sites, which will help you find the resources most relevant to your studies.

Useful web sites

- Cambridge dictionaries: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Google Books: <https://books.google.co.uk/>
- Government publications (UK): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>
- JSTOR – <https://www.jstor.org/> Journal content online
- Open Learn (Open University): <http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/>
- Oxford Dictionaries: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/>
- Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/> Literature
- UK Statistics: www.statistics.gov.uk or <http://ons.gov.uk>

Creating reading lists

When you've found the information you need, it is important that you keep a record of where you found it and mention your sources in your essay or report. This is called referencing. It not only helps readers locate the information themselves, but it reassures them that the information is well-researched. You might be accused of plagiarism if you do not acknowledge your sources.

Most referencing systems require that you record the following information:

Author - Date of Publication – Publisher - Place of Publication – Page numbers

It is a two-step process. You will need to create a bibliography or reading list of your sources and then create in-text references (also known as citations) when you mention the text. e.g.

In your essay:

At the conclusion of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph is overcome by "great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body." (186)

This is known as an in-text citation.

In your bibliography

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Penguin, 2006.

Your reference list should be located at the end of your assignment. Entries should be in alphabetical order by author's surname, or by title where there is no author.

There are many freely available referencing tools online, which create references for you.

e.g. ZoteroBib <https://zbib.org/> or Cite this for me <http://www.citethisforme.com>

Visit us



Augustine House Library is a modern university library in the heart of the historic city of Canterbury. It contains over 400,000 books, journals and other academic resources arranged over three floors. It is only a ten-minute walk from the North Holmes Road campus and conveniently located near bus and train services.

You are welcome to visit Augustine House Library to use the resources for your schoolwork. If you are under 16 you must have a registration form signed by an adult which you can obtain from the library website.

Opening hours

You can visit Augustine House within staffed hours. These are usually 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri and 9am-5pm Sat-Sun, but please check the Library Services website before you visit, as access is restricted around university exam time.

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Canterbury Christ Church University

For information about courses: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/StudyHere/HomeNew.aspx>

Open days: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/study-here/open-days/open-days-and-events.aspx>