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How to Conduct Library Research

Jessilyn Barrow

The ability to conduct library research is an important skill to have when it comes to writing research papers or literature reviews. In this essay, I will be explaining in great detail the process of conducting useful research. I will also be giving examples from my experience finding research to further help you understand each step. In order to conduct library research, you should consider three things. First, come up with a specific research question interesting to you, secondly, find scholarly articles with abstracts on a library website, and lastly, briefly reading the parts in each article that relates to your topic.

First of all, you must come up with a research question. A research question will prepare you to find specifically what article topics you will be looking for. When thinking of a research question, there are a few ideas you must take into account. You should first think of a topic that you are interested in. If you do not have an idea of something that interests you, you can think of hobbies you like, or current events that you follow. For example, my research question is “what is the relationship between the amount of people with schizophrenia and the amount of homeless people?” I thought of this question because I know I am intrigued to understand how people develop a mental illness, and what happens after it develops. In this case, my first idea for a topic would be mental illness. However, you must remember that certain topics may be too broad when it comes to searching for scholarly articles. In response, I narrowed my topic down to schizophrenia, which is a certain type of mental illness.

Once you come up with a specific topic you are interested in, you must form a question in a way in which you can research thoroughly. You should first form your question scientifically. What I mean by this is that it must be an idea that can be explained rather than simply answered with a “yes” or “no.” Also, your question should not already have been answered by other researchers. Considering my research question, I decided to figure out if there is some type of relationship between schizophrenia and homelessness. My question is subjective, which means it could be answered in many different ways based on data that can be collected. You do not want to make your question too objective considering it may not be able to make a valid argument with research data collected on the topic. Overall, your research question should be a specific topic you are interested in and not too simple or straightforward.

Furthermore, you must find scholarly articles that relate to aspects of your topic. The California State University, Monterey Bay library website is one easy way you can find sufficient sources. This website provides easy access to many different websites and books; all you have to do is use the search bar. However, you must know what you should type into the search bar because putting your whole research question in is not necessary. Articles will most likely not pop up if you do this. You should just type in certain aspects of your topic. For example, the key terms that I used from my research question are “homelessness” and “schizophrenia.” Taking into account these

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ideas, many different articles will show up that are related to both of your topics.

Once you have searched those topics from your question, there is a filter on the side of the site that will only pop up scholarly sources. The filter is labeled “peer-reviewed.” This is what helped me find credible research to my question. Looking through each article carefully is another method that can be used to confirm a scholarly article. In scholarly articles, there is usually something called an abstract. This is a paragraph at the very beginning that explains what the article will be discussing. This is a big giveaway that the article you are looking at is scholarly. This is also what I used to confirm teach article that I chose to use.

Another way that you can tell it is scholarly are by publishers. Typically, scholarly articles are published by credible people. An example could be some type of institution or university. Even though this is another way to confirm that the article is scholarly, I did not use this method. In my opinion, it is too much unnecessary work when you are already using the “peer-reviewed” filter and looking for the abstract. I would suggest saving yourself time and skipping this step in the process. For the most part, when looking for scholarly articles, I suggest filtering it to “peer-reviewed” and making sure there is an abstract.

Finally, after you have chosen your articles, it is time to read through them. Since the articles are extremely long, there is a shortcut to figuring what information you need to know from the article. I would highly advise you to save yourself time, and do not read every single part of each article. The first thing you should always read is the abstract as explained before. This will give you a brief understanding of what the whole article will be about. This is the main thing I read when making sure the article relates to my research question. The title of an article can seem like

it relates to your topic, but it actually may not. For example, I chose an article because the title was “The Source and Outcome of Schizophrenia.” I assumed homelessness would be an outcome for schizophrenia. However, the article did not mention anything about homelessness, so it was irrelevant to read. I figured this out after reading the abstract.

The next thing you should always read is the introduction, at least the first few sentences. In my opinion, this gives you a little bit more background on why the article is important in the first place. Also, it helps distinguish what the “they say” of the whole article is. The “they say” is described as the information the author will be arguing and explaining. I usually skim through this part just to give myself more clarification that this article will help me answer my research question, and to help me understand what points they will argue.

Then, I would suggest looking through each of the sections in the article to find parts that talk more about the topic you are researching. Usually, scholarly articles will label each one of their paragraphs to show what that section will talk about. If you look through those and notice that one of your key points is in the title, then it is possible that the paragraph will be related to your research question. For instance, in one of the articles I chose to read, there was a subtitle called “Loss of Contact with Mental Health Services.” I chose to skip to this after reading the abstract and introduction because it could possibly explain why there is a connection between schizophrenia and homelessness. The reason would be because there is no contact with health care to help these people out.

The last thing I would advise you to read is the conclusion. This is where the whole article explains the results that the researchers have figured out. The conclusion is also usually where you can easily find the

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“I say” of the article. The “I say” is known as the author’s results of his research. I used this mainly to figure out what they have gotten out of doing such a study. Overall, when it comes to reading the article, save yourself time and read the abstract, parts of the introduction, the conclusion, and the subtitles that are more related to your topic.

All in all, conducting library research is a long, but very useful process. Although this method of research may seem like a long process, you will become comfortable with

the process the more you look into each article. This information is good to use in any situation that requires you to find credible research. As long as you follow the steps, your research will be valid and applicable. The three steps you should keep in mind when researching is think of a specific research question that is interesting to you, use a library site and look for abstract when picking articles, and briefly read the important parts of the articles that only relate to your question.