Planning your search

It is important to plan your search so that you don’t waste time gathering information you don’t need.

You will learn how to

- Analyse your assignment topic and write down the key ideas
- Identify information you already have on the topic
- Create a mind map that describes the key ideas relating to your topic

A model of the research process:

The research process can be imagined as a funnel, with the many sources of data at one end, gradually narrowing down through the processes of collection, analysis and synthesis, until the data/information becomes knowledge and wisdom.

Some of the sources of data for your research include:

Data gained through a planned search
This is where most of your information for an assignment should come from.

Data given to you by others
Lecturers will nearly always give you some information on your assignment topics. This is a great place to begin your research.

Data you don’t want
Don’t let it distract you!

Dead ends and data you can’t get
This is frustrating but it’s part of the process and it happens to everyone. Don’t let it discourage you.

Why plan your search?

Planning your search will help you to:

Stay on topic
It is easy to get distracted and confused by the sheer amount of information available. Planning your search helps you to focus on what you need to know and avoid wasting time collecting information you don’t need.

Avoid poor quality information
Get to know the Library and plan to get most of your information from quality sources like books.
and journals, so you can avoid relying too heavily on websites that may not be appropriate for academic research.

**What do you need to find out?**

Look carefully at your assignment question to be sure you know exactly what you have to do. It is also important to know how much you need to write - you will probably need to do more research for a 3000 word essay than a 500 word one.

Essay questions usually have 3 parts:

**Instruction words** - verbs that tell you what you have to do. Examples are analyse, compare, discuss, evaluate, explain.

**Key concepts** - the focus of the question and the things you need to write about.

**Qualifiers** - words that limit the key concepts and make the question more specific.

**Example:**

Is state sovereignty being eroded or transformed by globalisation? Explain your answer.

- **state sovereignty** = Key concept. You will need to thoroughly understand the idea of state sovereignty so that you can discuss how it is being affected by globalisation.

- **eroded** = Qualifier. You will need to explain why you do/don’t think that state sovereignty is being eroded by globalisation.

- **transformed** = Qualifier. You will need to explain why you do/don’t think state sovereignty is being transformed by globalisation.

- **globalisation** = Key concept. You will need to thoroughly understand the idea of globalisation so that you can discuss how it is affecting state sovereignty.

- **explain** = Instruction word. Explain how you came to your answer, what evidence supports your view, why this evidence is more convincing than any evidence for the opposing view. Include examples.

**Do you already have some information?**

Read any information you already have so that you will know what you need to search for. This saves time!

- Have you had a lecture on this topic?
- Read your lecture notes

- Does your set text have anything to say about this topic?
- Look in the index and contents pages. (Do the same for books on your Further Reading list)

- Do any of the tutorials cover this topic?
- Read any set tutorial readings

**Create a mind map**

Start with your key concepts and add words and ideas that relate to them.
Sources to use for your mind map

Information sources that can help you add words to your mind map include:

Subject Dictionaries
Subject dictionaries are great for helping you understand new terms. See the Library Subject Guides for suggested dictionaries for your subject.

Subject Encyclopedias
Subject encyclopedia articles give you an overview of the subject and outline the most important facts. See the Library Subject Guides for suggested encyclopedias for your subject.

Basic Texts
Look carefully at your textbook.

- Does it have a Glossary that defines terms used in the book? You may find definitions of your key concepts here.
- Can you find your key concepts in the Contents or the Index? Read those chapters.
- Does the book have References that relate to your assignment topic? See if you can find those books and journals in the Library.

Keep adding to your mind map
You will find more words and ideas to add to your mind map as you read, so keep it with you. The words on your mind map will also help you to recognise relevant information when you see it.

Using your mind map
Use the keywords in your mind map to search for more information in the Library.

Summon – use for fast searches of almost all Library resources (this includes both the catalogue and databases)

Catalogue – use for finding books on a topic

Databases – use for finding journal articles, conference papers, newspaper articles on a topic