

Basic Research Tips

SEEKING BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Once you have identified the main topic and keywords for your research, find one or more sources of background information to read. These sources will help you understand the broader context of your research and tell you in general terms what is known about your topic. The most common background sources are encyclopedias and dictionaries from the print and online reference collection. Class textbooks also provide background information.

USE ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES

You can find encyclopedias and dictionaries for specific topics by using InfoHawk, by consulting a Subject Guide (an annotated bibliography of selected reference sources on a specific subject), or by asking a reference librarian to suggest appropriate titles.

EXPLOIT BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines, etc.) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. The sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research. Look up these sources in InfoHawk and periodical indexes. Check the subject headings listed in the subject field of the online record for these books and articles. Then do subject searches using those subject headings to locate additional titles. Remember that many of the books and articles you find in InfoHawk and periodical indexes will themselves have bibliographies. Check these bibliographies for additional relevant resources for your research. By routinely following up on sources cited in bibliographies, you can generate a surprisingly large number of books and articles on your topic in a relatively short time.

WORK FROM THE GENERAL TO THE SPECIFIC.

Find background information first, and then use more specific and recent sources.

RECORD WHAT YOU FIND AND WHERE YOU FOUND IT.

Write out a complete citation for each source you find; you may need it again later.

TRANSLATE YOUR TOPIC INTO THE SUBJECT LANGUAGE OF THE INDEXES AND CATALOGS YOU USE.

Check your topic words against a thesaurus or subject heading list as well as InfoHawk or other catalogs.

LOCATING MATERIALS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES

To find the location and call number of books (as well as videos, audio-recordings, microforms, maps, periodicals, and other resources) owned by the University of Iowa Libraries, use InfoHawk, the gateway to the libraries catalogs and other information resources. The University of Iowa uses Library of Congress call numbers for most materials. For a brief introduction to where materials are located in the Main Library check the locations card in your packet. For further information ask the staff at the Reference Desk, Government Publications and Special Collections.

OTHER CATALOGS AND FINDING AIDS

Materials available in the Government Publications Department and the Special Collections Department may use other classification systems; ask the staff in those departments for further information on location or access.

The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment or in its educational programs and activities on the basis of race, national origin, color, creed, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preference. The University also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to University facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Coordinator of Title IX, Section 504, and the ADA in the Office of Affirmative Action, (319) 335-0705 (voice) or (319) 335-0697 (text), 202 Jessup Hall, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242-1316.