Information Literacy Teaching Materials

The following materials were developed by HWC Librarian Todd Heldt in 2015 as part of a response to this study.

- Composing a Basic Search Strategy
- Creating an Annotated Bibliography
- Figuring Out What You Already Know
- How to Narrow Your Research Topic
- Information Timeline
- Usable Source Rubric
- What Do You Do When Activity

Composing a Search Strategy

I. Write a research question about your subject:

Examples:
Which crime prevention programs are most effective at cutting down on repeat offenses of juvenile delinquents?
What are the effects of pollution on frogs in marshlands?
How did Lewis Carroll portray madness in Alice in Wonderland?

How can wireless technology improve patient care in hospitals?

_____

_____.

II. Write down the key concepts found in your topic sentence:

Key concepts from one of the examples:

Wireless technology, patient care, hospitals

_____ _____ _____

Write 2 or 3 key concepts in your question.

III. Find Synonyms of (or words related to) your concepts:

Synonyms of example concepts:

Wireless technology	**patient care**	**hospitals**
PCS services	patient recovery	clinics
Wireless lan	patient treatment	emergency rooms

List synonyms or words related to concepts in your own topic sentence:

_____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____

IV. Connect Your search terms with Boolean Operators

And narrows your search:

A search for
Wireless technology and patient care and hospitals

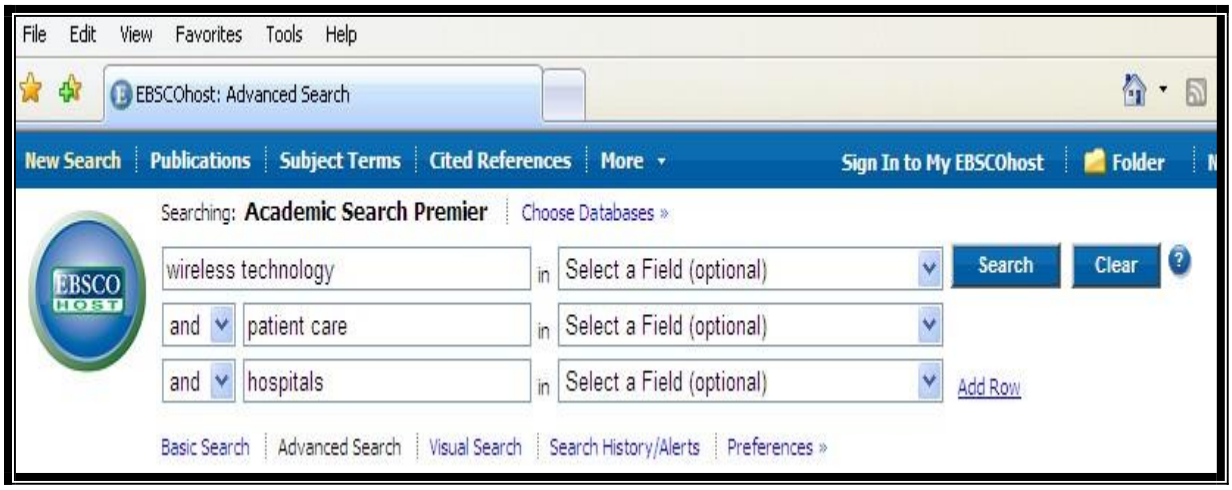
will retrieve *only* articles about *all three* concepts.

Or broadens your search:

A search for
patient care or patients or medical records

will retrieve *all* articles about *any of the three* concepts.

V. Enter your terms into one of our library databases:



As needed, substitute or include other terms from your list of synonyms and related concepts. For instance, substitute *clinic** for *hospital** or *wireless lan* for *wireless technology.*

VI. If You Need Help

Always feel free to ask a librarian for help! You can drop by the library without an appointment during our regular hours, or you can call us at (312) 553-5783.

Creating an Annotated Bibliography

Each entry on your annotated bibliography will have four parts:

- a citation
- a summary
- an evaluation of credibility
- and an assessment of the usefulness of the article to your project

The summary portion will consist of three points:

- The question or problem addressed by the article (the "topic)
- The article's method of analysis (experimental? theoretical?)
- The article's thesis, conclusions, and/or recommendations

The evaluation of credibility will note things such as:

- The timeliness of the study/paper.
- The author's level of expertise (how much has he published in this field?)
- The source's credibility (do they have a known bias, are they peer-reviewed, are they funded by a think tank with a political ideology?)

The assessment of the usefulness of the article to your project will disclose:

- What about the study is useful to your paper (an argument, a set of facts, the bibliography?)
- How you intend to use it (Does it support your main argument? Is it a counterargument? A refutation of a counterargument?)

Figuring Out What You Already Know

Once you have a research subject in mind, take some time to figure out what you already know about your topic. Take a sheet of paper and jot down some notes about everything that comes to mind concerning your subject. You need not write in complete sentences or fully develop your ideas. For now, you are simply noting what you already know.

After you have written your notes, ask yourself if there are details you don't know that would give you a fuller understanding of the topic. Some good questions to ask are:

How do my concepts fit together?

Is there a particular process, person, or sequence of events that is unclear to you?

Are there laws, agreements, or social mores that govern my subject?

What is the history of my subject?

What is the social context of my subject?

Are there different sides of the issue?

Am I on one particular side of the issue?

Why do I feel the way I do about my topic?

What reasons do others state for feeling a different way?

These questions should help you understand which areas you need to know more about before you begin your research.

How to Narrow Your Research Topic

When someone starts a research assignment, a typical mistake is to think too broadly about it. This is usually born out of having an interest in a subject but a limited understanding of everything that subject could encompass. For instance, if you wanted to write a paper about hip-hop music, you might do a search for that term in the databases and find yourself overwhelmed by all the information and unsure where to start! If you tried to write about all of the information such a broad search would turn up, you would soon find yourself with a book-length manuscript. Since your assignments are likely to be measured in pages instead of chapters, you will want to narrow your topic down as much as possible.

Here are some methods for narrowing your topic:

Ask Questions

One approach is to ask questions about your topic to narrow it down: Think, "Who, what, when, where, how?"

Question: What about hip-hop do I want to talk about?

Possible Answers: Hip-hop and activism? Hip-hop and therapy? Hip-hop and conflict resolution?

Question: Who do I want to talk about?

Possible Answers: Teenagers? Adults? Students?

Question: Where do I want to talk about?

Possible Answers: Workplace? High school?

Possible Narrowed Topic:

How can high schools use hip-hop conflict resolution to increase student safety?

Bring Yourself into the Paper

Another approach is to take an assigned topic and then try to find out how something you are personally interested in relates to that topic.

Assigned Topic: Climate Science

Possible Focus: How can businesses benefit by going green?

Possible Focus: How does meat consumption impact climate and ecology? Possible Focus: How could the music industry become more ecologically friendly?

Narrow Your Research Topic

What is your subject or broad topic?

_____

What about this subject do you want to talk about?

_____

Who do you want to talk about?

_____

Where do you want to talk about?

_____

What about this subject interests me?

_____

How can I relate this subject to an area that interests me?

_____

Information Timeline

How long it typically takes for an event to make it into various information sources.

When it happened		Where to go
Today	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Electronic Media (tv news, radio, the internet)**
Yesterday/Earlier this week	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Newspapers and Electronic Media**
A week or two ago	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Popular Magazines**
A month or more ago	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Popular Magazines**
Six months ago or more	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Scholarly Journals**
A year ago or more	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Scholarly Journals and Books**
Decades or centuries ago	>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Scholarly journals, Books and Encyclopedias**

Why?

A news team can film something happening, send it back to the station, have it edited and packaged, and then broadcast it on the news in a matter of hours. If the event is newsworthy, then newspapers and magazines can arrange to have coverage or commentary about the event appear in the next day's, week's, or month's issue. It takes longer for something to appear in a scholarly journal because those sources publish less frequently and because the information therein typically includes in-depth analysis. Finally, books and encyclopedias take even longer to write, edit, and publish. The general rule is that the longer it takes for the source to appear, the more in-depth the coverage will be. Note, however, that encyclopedias provide general overviews, and therefore are meant to introduce you to the topic.

A Caveat!

The internet extends the timeline. Webpages or blogs may contain information from any of these ranges, but the information you retrieve might not reflect the latest findings/understandings in the field. Likewise, you can retrieve many archived news articles or broadcasts from various dates, but they will reflect only what was known at that time. An excellent use for such contemporaneous sources is to provide social or historical context to your research, if necessary.

What Your Research Process Might Look Like:

You have been given the task of writing a research paper about President George H.W. Bush's efforts to convince the American public that the 1991 Iraq War was a worthwhile endeavor. To learn more about the subject, your research process might look like this:

Preliminary Reading

Encyclopedia Brittanica entries:

Iraq and the war of
1991 GeorgeHerbert
WalkerBush Saddam
Hussein
Kuwait

An Internet Search:

(advertising OR marketing OR public relations) AND (Gulf War OR Iraq War 1991)

Deeper Reading

EBSCOHost Search for full-text, peer-reviewed journals:

Carpenter, Ted Galen. "Cynical Myths And US Military Crusades In The Balkans." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22.3 (2011): 10-25. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 21 July 2014.

Garcia, Helio Fred. "On Strategy And War: Public Relations Lessons From The Gulf." *Public Relations Quarterly* 36.2 (1991): 29-32. *Business Source Elite*. Web. 21 July 2014.

The Library's Online Catalog:

Smith, Philip. *Why war? the Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.

Contextual Research

A Youtube.com search:

Desert Storm and Gulf War 1991

Newspaper or Magazine Archives in Microfiche/Microfilm:

Scanning the dates October 1990 to February 1991 for examples of new stories, ads, and editorials to determine the "mood" of the time.

Usable Source Rubric

	3	2	1
Authority	The publisher, author and/or source are established authorities on the subject. The work is scholarly or academic in nature and often cited by other researchers.	The publisher, author and/or source are not as highly regarded. The work may have been written for a popular or inexpert audience. Work may contain citations and references but is nevertheless less likely to be cited by other researchers.	The publisher, author, and/or source are looked down upon by experts in the field. The work is not cited by other researchers.
Objectivity	Tone is neutral and scholarly. Facts are presented without words that are meant to stir your emotions. The source cites other sources that agree with it as well as those which do not. Rebuttals are made with evidence, not personal	Source is neutral in tone but does not cite sources with differing views or refute them appropriately. Tone may be persuasive, for instance, a call to action.	Tone is persuasive, language displays bias, and presentation of points is one-sided.
Timeliness	Source is relevant to the time period you intend to discuss.	Source is somewhat out of the range of time you intend to discuss; however, it may still be relevant in describing context or outcomes.	Source is untimely and irrelevant.
Relation to Other Sources	Source is in broad agreement with other sources written by experts in the field. OR, source disagrees with them but provides clear, documented, verifiable evidence to the contrary. Remember that extraordinary claims	Source may agree or disagree with other sources accepted in the discipline but does not contain a list of works consulted or cited.	Source is an outlier among experts in the field and provides flawed, outdated, previously disproven, or unverified/unverifiable evidence.

12-10 This looks like a great source to use!
9-7 This may be a good source to use, as long as you provide some caveats and disclaimers. 6-4
This is not a good source to use!

What to Do With What You Find

Break students into small groups of 3-5 and give them the handout with instructions. Set the scene by saying, "You did some preliminary research in the library for your paper, and you emailed yourself a bunch of articles. You sit down at your computer with every intention of writing your first draft tonight, and you find that some of the articles are not exactly what you thought they would be when you just glanced at them. Discuss with your groupmates about what you can/could/should do in each of the following situations."

After they have a few minutes to discuss the hypothetical scenarios with each other, ask different groups for their consensus answers. Use their answers as a way to discuss ethical, pragmatic, and/or scholarly approaches to this aspect of information literacy, ie. the ability to ethically use the information they have found.

In your research you will find many different kinds of articles, some of which are more useful than others. In each of the following situations, what should you do?

1. What do you do when the article contains your keywords, but is not about your subject?

You are looking for articles about shell companies but end up with an article about Shell Oil Company .

2. What do you do when the article contains your keywords but is focused on a different aspect of your subject?

You want to write about social programs that help solve the problems of juvenile delinquency, but you find an article about how one particular neighborhood is protesting the opening of a new detox center for juvenile offenders.

3. What do you do when the article is about the same aspect of your subject, but from the opposite point of view?

You want to prove that government-funded after-school programs don't decrease gang violence, but the article contends that such programs actually *do* decrease gang violence.

4. What do you do when you can't refute the articles you have found that contradict your original claim?

Try as you might, you can't find anything that credibly rebuts what you have found.

5. What do you do when the article is about your subject and corroborates your thesis?

You have found an article that reinforces your point of view and will work PERFECTLY to prove that you are right!

You pull up an article that contains all of your search terms, so you're done, right? Not exactly. Finding sources is only the first step. Once you get into your research, you will likely find several different *kinds* of sources, some more useful than others. Here is what to do…

When:
The article contains your keywords, but is not about your subject. You are looking for articles about shell companies but end up with an article about Shell Oil Company or about a company that sells sea shells (by the sea shore).

Then:
You have to look for other articles because a quote from such an article will not help you prove or defend your thesis. You may even have to reevaluate your search terms and determine if they should be more specific of more general.

When:
The article contains your keywords but is focused on a different aspect of your subject. You want to write about social programs that help solve the problems of juvenile delinquency, but you find an article about how one particular neighborhood is protesting the opening of a new detox center for juvenile offenders.

Then:
Store the information away in the back of your mind because, although it does not help you prove your point, you might be able to use it to explain the social context of the paper.

When:
The article is about the same aspect of your subject, but from the opposite point of view. You want to prove that government-funded after-school programs don't decrease gang violence, but the article contends that such programs actually *do* decrease gang violence.

Then:
Save the article as a source for a counterargument to include in your paper, then read more articles and hope that they will help you prove your point. Use the new articles to refute the claims of the first article.

How do you refute an article?
Study more articles and find out if the first article is the consensus view of experts or a lone crackpot crying out into the universe. Obviously, you don't want to call someone a crackpot in your college-level paper, so you might instead say that, while the opinion is interesting, it is ultimately contradicted by experts in the field. Then you would present those experts' findings.

Is there bias?
Do some research to see if the author or source has a consistent political bias. If so, those allegiances may call into question the truthfulness of the claims therein.

Is it timely?
Science, research, and technology update our understanding of the world daily. Claims that represented the best understanding in the year 2000 may no longer represent the best understanding. Look for more current articles to see if anything has changed.

Does it Use Weasel Words?
Weasel words are used by some commentators to disguise personal opinions as facts. These phrases are not always weasel words, but when you see them, you should pay attention to the claims being made to see if they actually ring true. Common weasel words are:
Some people say...
Research has
shown... It is
believed that…
It has been said/suggested…
Many people believe…
It is often argued that…
Critics/experts agree
that...

And there are many others. What each of these phrases has in common is that it makes a claim without providing any indication of who said it, when she said it, or why she said it. In other words, when you see these words be sure to start asking questions. Further research *might* show that the article is not being entirely honest.

But Then:
What if you can't refute the articles you have found that contradict your original claim?

Then:
You might have to reconsider your thesis. Perhaps you are wrong and should try to prove the opposite of what you first thought. Or, perhaps your thesis is only conditionally right. Instead of saying, "It is best to approach such and such problem in such and such solution," you might instead qualify your thesis statement. Examples of qualifying a statement are:

I am opposed to abortion *except in cases of rape or incest.*
Or
When the economy is good, we should enjoy lower taxes, *but in times of economic distress*, the highest wage earners should be expected to pay a higher tax rate.
Or
Genetically modified foods should be allowed in the United States *if they are clearly labeled as such.*

When:
The article is about your subject, corroborates your thesis, and is timely and free of bias.

First:
You *still* have to evaluate it for credibility, timeliness, and bias. If the article is outdated, comes from an unreliable source, or is biased, you may have to leave it out of your paper or include it with caveats and qualifiers. HOWEVER, if the article passes inspection…

Then:
Take notes for later. Write down all of the information you will need for your works cited page. Write down any information you will want to quote, paraphrase or summarize, being careful to note the page number or paragraph number of the where you got the information. This information can be mapped out in your outline and used in your paper. Always follow the documentation style your instructor wants you to use.