

2011

Sources of information



INTRODUCTION

The Bamford library houses over 42,000 books and around 1250 journals

There are also collections of pamphlets, technical reports and theses.

In addition to these print resources the library provides access to a range of electronic resources including electronic journals, electronic books and bibliographic databases

WHERE TO LOOK

You will probably be asked to use a range of sources for your assignment – however not all sources may be appropriate or applicable.

The source of information you require will depend on your research question.

Think about your question.

- is it a broad subject area that is likely to be covered in textbooks?
- is it a specialist subject area, or a new area of research that is more likely to be covered in journals or conference proceedings.
- are you looking for technical or commercial material which might be contained in a pamphlet ; a popular journal or on the internet?
- are you looking for official material from a government department – which might be available in a pamphlet or on the internet?
- would your assignment benefit from statistics or other official figures which might be available from official sites on the internet?

BOOKS – THE ADVANTAGES

It is likely that you will consult books for every assignment.

You can confidently use the books in the library as they have been handpicked by the librarians and the academic staff.

Consult books when you need:

- ✓ generally accepted facts about a topic
- ✓ a broad overview of a topic
- ✓ historical information
- ✓ summaries of information to support your argument
- ✓ bibliographies

BOOKS – THE DISADVANTAGES

Not all books on your subject will be appropriate for your research.

Books may not include the most up to date developments in your subject area, nor the more specialised detail.

Beware:

- ✗ books can become out of date – make sure the information is current enough for your needs
- ✗ some books in the library will have been kept for historical purposes
- ✗ books tend to cover broad subject areas – they might not cover the more specific topics
- ✗ books have an intended audience – some will be aimed at the general public, others will assume a level of subject knowledge

FINDING BOOKS

To find books on your subject you need to search the library catalogue (OPAC) which you can find on the Library home page.

The search box is very easy to use; you can enter words from a title, the author's surname or the subject you are interested in if you don't know the title of a specific book. You can also combine a surname and a word from the title or a key word to reduce the number of results.

Make a note of the classification number (both the numbers and the letters).

Check that it is not currently on loan.

Find the books on the library shelves – remember that books are shelved numerically by classification number.

Do ask if you can't find what you need.



JOURNALS

Journals are published at regular intervals throughout the year.

This allows them to cover breaking news and current developments.

This means they are extremely useful sources of information for academic research.

There are two types of journal – popular and academic. It is important that you understand the difference.

POPULAR JOURNALS

Popular journals are written for the general public and/or the general worker in the field.

It is easy to spot a popular journal:

- They are often printed on glossy paper.
- They contain photographs and advertisements.
- They are often published very frequently – weekly or fortnightly.

POPULAR JOURNALS - ADVANTAGES

Popular journals can be very useful as they:

- ✓ provide introductions to a topic
- ✓ often contain short articles written in accessible language
- ✓ often cover current events and breaking developments
- ✓ contain attractive pictures
- ✓ provide interesting opinions
- ✓ often contain practical advice

POPULAR JOURNALS - DISADVANTAGES

You need to be careful with popular journals however as they:

- ✗ are often written by journalists, who are not necessarily experts in the field
- ✗ rarely include author credentials – making it difficult to validate the information
- ✗ rarely cite sources
- ✗ may contain opinions rather than facts, or present information that is not supported by evidence
- ✗ are aimed at the general reader – and may therefore not be detailed enough for academic research

ACADEMIC JOURNALS

Academic journals are written for scholars and professionals in the field. They assume a level of subject knowledge.

It is easy to spot an academic journal:

- Articles usually begin with an abstract.
- The author's credentials and affiliations are normally listed.
- They usually contain bibliographies.
- They rarely contain photographs or advertisements.
- They are not usually printed on glossy paper.
- They are usually published less frequently (monthly, quarterly) with a volume and issue number.

ACADEMIC JOURNALS – ADVANTAGES

Academic journals are also known as peer-reviewed journals.

When an article is submitted to an academic journal, it is reviewed by an editorial board to check for accuracy and style.

This makes academic journals reliable sources of quality information.

Academic journals:

- ✓ contain long in-depth articles
- ✓ include facts supported by evidence
- ✓ report new developments in the subject
- ✓ clearly identify the authors – allowing the reader to check their authority
- ✓ are usually written in objective language
- ✓ include bibliographies
- ✓ are written for an informed audience

FINDING JOURNALS

If you want to check if we have a particular issue of a journal in print, use the library catalogue (OPAC). Remember to search for the journal title not the article title.

Journals are kept upstairs in the library and are shelved alphabetically by journal title.

If you want to find an article electronically, for which you already have the details, the best place to look is the A to Z title list which you will find on the electronic resources page of the library website. If searching off campus, you might need your Athens login & password.

Again, type in the journal title, not the article title. If we have access to the journal, click on the blue link under the title and then look for the issue you need.



CHOOSING A DATABASE

Databases contain details about individual journal articles which make it easier to search and find articles on a topic. A database often focuses on a particular subject area

Some of these databases contain the full-text of articles, conference papers and press releases.

Many of them, however, include only an index or abstract of an article, or book

Make sure you select the appropriate database for your topic or source

Remember if you are looking for an article for which you already have the details, use the OPAC to find out if we have it in print or the A to Z title list to see if we have electronic access. You only need to use a database if you don't know the details of an article.

If your topic is:

- **agriculture** – use CAB Abstracts; Land, Life, Leisure; ScienceDirect; Web of Knowledge, OpenFields
- **business** – use ABI/INFORM; MINTEL
- **engineering** – use ASABE; Compendex; CAB Abstracts; ScienceDirect; Land, Life, Leisure and Web of Knowledge
- **environmental** – use Geobase; ScienceDirect; Greenfile, Web of Knowledge; CAB Abstracts; Land, Life, Leisure
- **food** – use CAB Abstracts; Land, Life, Leisure; Food Science Source; IGD
- **legal** – use LEXIS/NEXIS; iSURV
- **tourism** – use Land, Life, Leisure
- **veterinary** – use Land, Life, Leisure, CAB, Abstracts ScienceDirect; Web of Knowledge

The library has produced a set of work books on how to use several of the databases: ScienceDirect, CAB Abstracts, Land, Life Leisure and Food Science Source

OTHER PRINT RESOURCES

The Bamford Library also provides access to other print resources:

Pamphlets – produced by companies, government departments, lobby groups and other organisations. They provide short, focussed, often technical information on a range of issues. Pamphlets are listed on the library catalogue (OPAC) and are shelved by classification number in a separate pamphlet section on the ground floor.

Conference proceedings – very useful sources of information for new developments and breaking news in the field. Conference proceedings are listed on the library catalogue and are shelved by classification number in the main book stock.

Dissertations – useful for research and bibliographies. Dissertations are listed on the library catalogue (OPAC) and shelved alphabetically by course title (then in year order, then alphabetically by author) at the back of the ground floor of the library.

PhD Theses – useful for new areas of research and bibliographies. The library has a collection of PhD theses shelved alphabetically by author on the second floor of the library. Electronic copies of theses from other institutions are available free of charge on ETHOS (<https://ethos.bl.uk/>)

THE INTERNET

The internet is a valuable and valid source of information – however it must be approached with caution.

You need to ensure that the information you access over the internet is current and reliable.

Use the internet when you need:

- information about companies
- information provided by official bodies such as government departments; lobbying groups and other organisations
- current news and information
- multi-media material
- journal articles – search google scholar to find academic journal articles, some of them in full text

THE INTERNET - DISADVANTAGES

Whilst the vast range of information available makes the internet a really useful source of information – please be aware of its potential hazards:

- ✗ Anyone can publish information on the internet – not all of it will be accurate or reliable.
- ✗ Be careful of biased or subjective information.
- ✗ Information might not be supported by evidence.
- ✗ Be careful of reusing images or data which are subject to copyright – you could be breaking the law.
- ✗ Information can quickly become out of date – it is sometimes difficult to check the date of information on the internet.
- ✗ Information on the internet is often temporary – what is there today, may not be tomorrow.

INTERNET SEARCHING

Unlike the information provided by the library, information on the internet is not organised or reviewed.

Searching without due care can result in vast numbers of “hits” and/or information that is irrelevant, unreliable or biased.

Here are a few tips on internet searching:

- have a look at the recommended internet resources on the library homepage (<http://library.harper-adams.ac.uk>)
- try one of the subject gateways. You can see a range of these at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/libWWW/irn/pinakes/pinakes.html> These are useful as the resources have been handpicked by experts in the field
- advanced searching on Google© enables you to limit your search by domain name (eg. .ac,.gov, .org) or file type (eg. pdf)
- Google scholar© allows you to search for academic journal articles – and links to the articles where they are available

FINDING INFORMATION – RECAP

Use this quick chart to help you find the information source you require:

TYPE OF INFORMATION	WHERE TO SEARCH
Books	OPAC
Journals	OPAC for print copies in the library; A to Z title list for electronic journal access; bibliographic databases to find articles on a particular topic – remember to choose the correct database for your subject.
Pamphlets	OPAC
Conference proceedings	OPAC; the internet
Theses/Dissertations	OPAC; ETHOS
The internet and websites	Library homepage or subject gateways for recommended sites; google scholar for academic journals; google advanced for more targeted searches

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

You should now:

- recognise the most common sources of information
- be confident in selecting the most appropriate sources for your research
- understand the difference between academic and popular journals
- know where to look for information

That's all there is to it!