

## **Develop Search Skills**

This week we're going to be talking to one of the Liaison Librarians about how to do research. We'll be looking in detail at how to go about breaking a topic into keywords and how to improve the results you get from a search.

So let me introduce Rachel who is part of the Academic Liaison Team. If you've listened to Podcast Three you will already know that Liaison Librarians and how they work closely with your course team.

### **So Rachel could you tell us what advice you would give to students when they have a topic to research?**

OK. Well I think it's important that students realise that there's more to research than simply hitting Google and trying to find an answer. In fact if you're researching well, by the end of your assignment instead of presenting an answer or a really neat conclusion, what you might find is that you've got more questions - and that's a good thing. It's also important to be aware that research can sometimes be a frustrating process. So you might find that the ideas you have lead to dead ends and you might have to change the direction of your research.

So we try to tell students to be prepared for the process of research to feel quite messy. It'll probably take longer than you expect and it's best to be flexible about the direction your topic might take you in.

### **Thank you. On a practical level what sort of things should students do to get their research off to a good start do you think?**

Well obviously you need to know the parameters of your assignment. So we always say to go back and read the brief carefully, do things like check the word count, and find if you're expected to include things like journal articles or primary sources.

Once you've got that clear, ask yourself what you know already. So that's probably a good time to start jotting down the keywords or main concepts, and these could be names of theorists or dates. It could be names of events or objects. And if it's relevant to your topic it can be a good idea to go back and look over lecture notes or check any reading list you may have been given. You could then maybe do a basic Google search or dip into Wikipedia to help scope out the topic further.

Remember that you're not going to stay with Wikipedia but you are using it to pull out more keywords and ideas and you can add these new words to that list. Some people also find it helpful to talk through the topic with a friend. Talking to someone else can give you a fresh perspective on it and give you new ideas and new examples for you to follow up. You might also want to go back to the Study Hub web pages and look for advice there and to look at research skills in the Getting Started section.

### **Thank you. The next step would be to start to locate material for your assignment do you think?**

Yep. Searching is a step you're likely to repeat several times as you find out more. You'll end up adding to your keywords and then having to search again. That's a process you repeat several times.

### **So what would you recommend someone uses to find this material?**

The Library search tool is always going to be a good starting point. That will search the library collections - the print books, e-books, and the journal articles all in one go. So what you do is, you type in some keywords and look through the results. It's likely you're going to get a lot of results. So it's a good idea to use the filters to narrow these down. You might use it to narrow them down by year so you focus on what's been recently published or by type of material you might want to find a book and not an article.

### **So are there any clever tips you have for getting more focused results.**

One that I use quite a lot is the phrase search. So this is where you put quotation marks around a phrase that you want to search for. For example - influencer marketing - put quotation marks around "influencer marketing" to search for exactly that.

There are two useful words to know about as well, and that's "and" and "or" so using "and" will combine two ideas or keywords. It will narrow the search down. For example if you wanted to find out about the effects of poverty on crime try typing the words - **crime and poverty**.

If you wanted to search for two different concepts or keywords type "or" in between them.

An example for that would be - cats or dogs. Also use "or" when you're searching for similar words. For example - **university or higher education**. Another example might be - sneakers or trainers - or - skyscraper or multi-storey. So using "or" will broaden out research, and it should get more results.

And again if that sounds confusing the Study Hub research pages have more about how to improve your search. And there are also some short quizzes where you can test what you've learned.

### **So what about if someone wants individual help on a one to one basis?**

Individual help can be really useful so we offer a drop in service called the Info-Perch which runs in both libraries on both campuses.

Plus you can book an appointment with your librarian through the library subject guides, and for our off campus students we offer a chat service called Ask a Librarian.

### **So to sum up:**

- Give yourself a bit of time to do your research
- Make sure you unpack your topic
- Think of different ways to describe it
- And remember there's lots of help available if you need it

Thanks Rachel. In our next podcast we're taking a look at some of the sources of information that you might be using to do your research. These include peer reviewed journal articles, primary and secondary sources, and we will also suggest ways you can make the most out books.