

# Supporting your research

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Before you start, you should consider three key questions:

1. **What** sort of information do I need?
2. **Where** should I look for information?
3. **How** can I search effectively so that I find relevant materials for my research topic?

## Information Sources

Information Sources are typically categorised into three broad categories based on their proximity to original source material:

- **primary:** original materials on which other research is based.
- **secondary:** interpretation, commentary or analysis of other sources.
- **tertiary:** organisation, categorisation, index or collection of sources.

Research material can be drawn from a wide range of different research resources. As well as using traditional sources such as books and journal articles, you may want to use news items, government reports, statistical or audiovisual material.

Some materials such as scholarly books and journals go through a rigorous 'peer review' process where they are analysed by experts in the field for reliability and quality. However, it can be more difficult to establish the provenance of other sources of information - for example anyone can create and disseminate information via the web.

### 1. Primary Sources

These are first hand accounts or records of activity as they happened or were created, without any subsequent interpretation or commentary.

Examples include:

- Original artwork and literary works
- Theses and research findings
- Speeches, correspondence and diaries
- Interviews and first hand news accounts

A wealth of primary sources are available to you at the University, many in digital format. Use the [archives](#) section of the A-Z Database List to access the various resources. The [Primary Sources LibGuide](#) provides guidance on finding primary sources.

## 2. Secondary Sources

These provide interpretation, commentary or analysis of other sources. They are typically written after the event or activity being discussed, and are not based on direct observation of involvement.

Examples include:

- Textbooks, books and journal articles that do not present new research
- Dissertations
- Commentaries and criticisms
- Newspaper articles that are opinions/reviews/analysis rather than first hand reporting on events

Use the [Library research tools](#) to help you to find relevant secondary sources.

## 3. Tertiary Sources

Organisation, categorisation, index or collection of primary and secondary sources. These sources typically list or collate other sources, rather than adding additional commentary or observations.

Examples include:

- Dictionaries & encyclopedias
- Bibliographies, fact books and digests
- Directories and guidebooks
- Indexing and abstracting sources

Many of these resources are now available in digital format - find out more on the [Online Reference Resources LibGuide](#).

Read more about critical reading guidance.

## **Critical Reading**

If you are new to critical reading it can be helpful to use a list of questions to guide you as you read.

Some useful questions you might consider are:

1. **Who is the author?** e.g. Are they a key name in the field? Have they been mentioned by your lecturers? Have they been cited by other key authors? Are they from a particular university or organisation? Could this bias them in any way?
2. **When was the text written?** e.g. Is it up-to-date enough for the subject you are studying? If it is a key text from the past how is it likely to have been influenced by the time when it was written? How have subsequent writers built on this?
3. **What kind of text is it?** e.g. Is it a core text-book for your course? Is it an article from a peer-reviewed journal? Is it from a government website? Could there be any bias?
4. **What is the key argument?** i.e. What is the main point the author is trying to make?
5. **How does the author support this argument?** e.g. Do they use evidence based on research or theory? Do they use logical reasoning?
6. **Is the evidence sound?** e.g. Is it up-to-date and reliable? Are there any weaknesses in the research? Is every step of the reasoning logical and coherent?
7. **How does this argument compare with other texts you have read on this subject?** e.g. does it agree or disagree? Does it perhaps build on the argument of another writer and develop it further? Or does it come from a completely different perspective? If so how does it differ? Why is it different? Is it convincing?
8. **What are the implications of the text?** e.g. What are the consequences of what has been argued? How does this link to the wider debate? What is the logical next step in terms of further research or debate?
9. **Is there any information the author has omitted?** e.g. Has the author taken other perspectives into account?