Steps to Take in Researching a Topic
at the Henderson Library, Georgia Southern University

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SECTION 1

Look for Information in Different Formats

Described below are the chief information formats that you can obtain from the Henderson Library. The library also has some information in formats not described here, such as video recordings, sound recordings, and one-of-a-kind manuscripts.

Reference Books

a. Definition

Reference books are dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, atlases, and directories on all different subjects. They are designed to use for looking up information quickly, rather than to be read all the way through.

b. Where to find reference books

Reference books are in a special section of shelves in the Henderson Library. If you have trouble locating the Reference Collection, ask a librarian.

They are in call number order according to the Library of Congress Classification System, which is an arrangement by subject. All of the books in the same subject area will be close together on the shelves. A good way to find a reference book that will meet your need is to look at the call number system (click here or check the chart posted in the Reference Area), see what subject area your topic or question would fall into, and then browse the reference shelves in that call number area. The labels at the end of each row of shelves in the Reference Collection tell what range of call numbers is in that row.

You can also ask the librarian at the Learning Commons Desk to help you find an appropriate reference book.

Reference books are listed in our library’s catalog, just like other books.

A number of reference books are available to Georgia Southern users online. These include a general encyclopedia, Encyclopedia Britannica Online. For other online reference books, go to the Henderson Library homepage at http://library.georgiasouthern.edu; then select “GALILEO” (second line down...
in the center section of the webpage); select “Browse by type” from the yellow bar; then select “Dictionaries” or “Encyclopedias” or whatever type of reference book you want to find. Reference books in different subjects may also be found under “Browse by Subject.”

c. When to use reference books

A convenient way to get started researching a topic is to read an article on it in a general or specialized encyclopedia. This will give you an overview of the topic, help you decide how you might want to limit your topic, give you words and phrases to use in your search for further information, and possibly suggest some other sources of information.

Use reference books for a quick fact check. For instance, use an English language dictionary (call numbers starting with PE) to find out how to spell a word.
Books

a. Definition

A book is usually a one-time publication, as opposed to a periodical, which is published over and over again on a regular basis (although a book may be revised or updated and republished several times; these are called different editions). A book is usually longer and covers a broader subject than a periodical article does.

b. How to find books

To find out what books on a subject are available for you to borrow from the Henderson Library, search our catalog. To find out about books that you may borrow from any library in the University System of Georgia, check the GIL Universal Catalog. Section 3 below tells you how to do this.
If you are looking for a **particular book**, search our catalog [https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/](https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/) or the GIL Universal Catalog [https://giluc.usg.edu/](https://giluc.usg.edu/) by author or title. To do this, go into the GIL Classic Catalog (as opposed to GIL-Find), if you are not in it already. Click “Exact Search” at the top of the catalog home page. To do a title search, click in the circle before “Title.” Type into the blank the exact title, **except for a, an, or the** when it is the first word of the title (actually, if you just type the first part of the title, you will retrieve all titles starting with the words you typed, and you can see if the one you want is among them).
To do a search by author, click in the circle before “Author.” Type into the blank the author’s name in the form **lastname, firstname.** You will be put into an alphabetical list of authors’ names at the point where that name occurs. Click on the author you want, and you will see a list of that author’s books in the catalog.

Sometimes the easiest way to find a book that is really helpful is to **browse** in the section of the library shelves where books on your topic would be. Once you have the actual book in hand, you will be able to tell better if it would be useful to you than if you just see a catalog record or citation for it. Although some of our less often used books that you can check out are in storage and must be requested from the catalog, the books which people have found most useful are in open shelves for you to browse. They are arranged in call number order; this is an arrangement by subject, so by looking at an outline of the call number system [http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/](http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/), you can find out what call number range you would need to browse in order to find books on your topic.

If you need a book that is not available for you to borrow within the University System of Georgia, you can register for the interlibrary loan service called **ILLiad**
(if you have not done so already); registering for ILLiad is easy and free of charge to you. Log in to ILLiad at this site:

http://webill.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/illiad/logon.html

Then you can place an interlibrary loan request by clicking on “Loan” and filling out and submitting the form online. We will borrow the book for you from some other library. Items ordered through interlibrary loan usually get here in three or four days, although if they are hard to find, they may take several weeks or a month to arrive.

Should you be traveling to the vicinity of another library, you may find a book there that you need. The database WorldCat lists most of the books in most of the libraries in the United States.

Moreover, most libraries make their catalogs available on the Internet nowadays.

Many books (by no means all, yet) are now available in full text on the World Wide Web. Some of these are free; you can usually find them by googling the author and title. Others must be purchased. Our library has purchased a number
of electronic books for you to use. They are listed in our library catalog, just like other books.

c. Evaluate the book

$ Find this information:
   – date of publication - title page or back of title page; same as the most recent copyright date.
   – publisher - title page
   – information about the author - book jacket, very beginning of the book, very end of the book, or Preface/Foreword/Acknowledgements
   – see if the book has footnotes, endnotes, and/or Bibliography/List of Works Cited. These will lead you to other sources of information. Their presence is also a good indication that the book is a scholarly work.
   – Check the Table of Contents to see what the work is about.
   - Check the index to see if your topic is covered in the work.

$ Evaluate the work for accuracy, timeliness, and reliability of the author and publisher. See Section 7 below for guidance on how to do this.

d. When to use books

$ Since a book is likely to cover a broader subject than an article does, reading a book is often a way to figure out how to narrow down your topic and to get background information on the subject that will help you to interpret your particular topic.

$ Books usually take more than a year to be written and published. Thus, they are not especially good sources for rapidly changing fields (such as information technology, for example, where a book will likely be out of date as soon as it is published) or current events. They are good sources for past history and for fields where information does not rapidly go out of date.

$ Primary sources (see Section 7 below) for your topic will sometimes be books (e.g., the novel that you have to study for a literature class) or will be found in books (e.g., anthologies of historical documents).

$ Books, like articles, may have a thesis, or point that they are trying to prove (for example, that by studying hereditary traits in families, scientists have isolated the gene responsible for a certain disease). Before using a book in your research, decide whether or not you find its thesis convincing.
Periodical Articles

a. Definition

A periodical is anything that is published over and over again on a regular basis. Journals, magazines, and newspapers are different kinds of periodicals:

- **Journal** is often used to refer to a scholarly, professional, or peer-reviewed periodical. Sometimes, however, the word journal is used for any periodical.
- **Magazine** usually refers to a popular periodical on glossy paper, although, again, this is not a hard-and-fast rule.
- **Newspaper** is a periodical that mainly reports news. It is usually published on flimsy paper called newsprint. Older issues of newspapers are kept on microfilm in our library.

Each issue of a periodical generally contains more than one article. An article usually covers one fairly narrow topic, and often has a thesis, or point that it is trying to prove.

b. How to find periodical articles

$ Occasionally, you will have to check indexes in print form for citations to older periodical articles (earlier than the mid-1980's). Indexes usually are found in yearly volumes. Each volume lists articles published during that year. Usually, index entries are arranged in alphabetical order by subject. Indexes are listed in the library catalog, and in Eagle Source. The librarian at the Learning Commons Desk or the library liaison for your academic department can also help you choose an appropriate index for your research.

$ Check electronic databases for citations to more recent articles (and many older articles, as well). Section 4 below tells you how to do this.

$ Many databases include periodical articles in full-text.

$ There are a growing number of periodicals that are published in electronic form on the World Wide Web.

$ But, for some articles, you will need to locate the periodical that contains the article. Section 5 below tells you how to do this.

$ If our library does not have an article that you want, you can receive it from another library by placing an interlibrary loan request at:
Evaluate articles that you find. Section 7 below offers you guidance about how to do this.

c. When to use periodical articles

There are many different types of periodicals (see Section 7 below); they are useful for different purposes.

Scholarly periodical articles are generally considered the best sources to use for research. Your teacher may require you to use scholarly articles only.

Use recent newspapers, news magazines, and other news sources as primary sources (see Section 7 below) for current issues and events.

For events in the past, use newspapers, news magazines, and other news sources published at the time they took place as primary sources (see Section 7 below).
Web Sites

a. Definition

This refers to things that were first published on the World Wide Web, not to things that were originally published elsewhere and are merely delivered via the World Wide Web (an example of the latter would be a periodical article that appears in full text in an electronic database such as Academic Search Complete or Lexis/Nexis).

b. How to locate Web sites

Many Web sites that are useful for research in a variety of subjects are linked to Eagle Source. We have evaluated these to determine that they are reliable sources of information. If you check the Web sites of university faculty here and elsewhere and of other university libraries, you will probably find links to other Web sites that have already been evaluated.

There are various Web search engines, the most popular of which is Google. Before doing your search, review the general principles for designing a computer search, discussed in Section 4 below, and read the Help Screens for the particular search engine to see how these principles are applied in that search engine. Remember that it is up to you to evaluate Web sites that you find using a search engine.

c. Evaluate Web sites

It is especially important that you evaluate a Web site before using it for your research. While most things that appear in print have been evaluated by someone before they were published, this is not the case with Web sites. Anyone with the technical know-how can put anything on the Web, whether they know what they are talking about or not!

Evaluate Web sites for accuracy, timeliness, and the aims and credibility of the person(s) and organization that put them on the Web (these are the same criteria that you would use to evaluate any source of information). See Section 7 below.

The domain of a Web site will offer you a valuable clue as to its trustworthiness (see Section 7 below).

Since the Web is hypertext, you can easily move from one site to another,
sometimes without even realizing it. Each time you link to a different site, you will have to evaluate it.

d. When to use Web sites

Web sites are so varied that there is no general rule to tell you when they are useful. Bear in mind that there is a lot of junk on the Web and that you have to work extra hard to evaluate Web sites. Therefore, you will probably not want to do all of your research on the Web.

Web sites can be much more up-to-date than print sources, because it takes such a short time to produce them. Therefore, the Web is especially useful when you need the very latest information. However, Web sites are not always updated regularly. You need to look for the date when a site was last updated, and make sure that it is recent enough for your purposes. If no date is given, distrust the site on principle – it was created by a careless person!

Many Web sites which are not reliable as secondary sources can be valuable as primary sources, depending on your research topic.
SECTION 2
Browse to Get Started

STEPS:

a. Looking at the outline of the call number system, identify the call number area(s) where information on your topic would be found.

b. Looking in the appropriate call number area(s) of the Reference Collection, find an article on your topic.

c. Look for books on your topic in the appropriate call number area(s) of the Book Stacks in the Henderson Library.

d. Look for articles on your topic in the appropriate call number area(s) of the Periodicals.

e. In the things you find, look for useful citations and ideas on how to pursue your research. Then follow these up.

The library has three types of printed materials that are arranged in call number order:

- reference books
- books that you can check out (not all of these are on the open shelves, but only the most recent or heavily used)
- periodicals

Each of these is arranged according to a call number system called the Library of Congress Classification System. This is a classification by subject. Call numbers in this system are a combination of letters and numbers. Below is an outline of the call number system, giving the letter or letters that begin the call numbers for items in each broad subject area. Sometimes, the easiest way to find what you need is to just see what call number range your topic would fall into and browse through that range.

A General
   AE Encyclopedias
   AI Indexes
   AY Almanacs

B Philosophy; Psychology; Religion
   B  Philosophy (general)
   BF Psychology; Occult
   BL-BX Religion

C Background Disciplines for History
   CT Biography

D History: General; Europe; Asia; Africa
E  History: United States
   E 185 African-Americans
F  History: Individual States and Regions of the United States; Other parts of North and South America
   F 281-295 Georgia
G  Geography and Anthropology
   G Atlases
   GR Folklore
   GT Customs
   GV Sports and Recreation
H  Social Sciences
   HA Statistics
   HE-HJ Economics and Business
   HM-HX Sociology and Social Issues
J  Political Science and Government
   JF-JQ Political Institutions and Public Administration
   JX International Law
K  Law
L  Education
   LB Theory and Practice
   LC Special Education
   LD, etc. Higher Education
M  Music
N  Art
P  Language and Literature
   PE English Language, including dictionaries
   PN Literature (general)
   PR English Literature
   PS American Literature
Q  Science
   QA Mathematics and Computer Science
   QB Astronomy
   QC Physics
   QD Chemistry
   QE Geology
   QH Natural History
   QK Botany
   QL Zoology
   QM Human Anatomy
   QP Physiology; Nutrition
   QR Microbiology
R  Medicine
   RC Psychiatry
The Reference Collection in the Henderson Library includes encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, almanacs, atlases, and directories for all different subject areas. **A good way to get started with your research is to browse in the Reference Collection.** Remember that it is arranged in call number order. Look at the outline of the call number system (given above) and pick out a broad subject area or areas (there may be more than one) that your research topic falls into. Find a book in that call number area in the Reference Collection that has an article on your research topic which gives a good overview of it, geared to the non-specialist. Read this article and see if you can glean from it the following things:

$ Ways in which you might want to limit your topic if your original topic turns out to be too broad to handle.

$ Some words and phrases that might be useful as search terms when you research your topic.

$ Help in identifying other sources of information (books, articles, Web sites, etc.) on your topic.

If you cannot get to the library to browse in the Reference Collection, remember that there are also a number of reference books in different subjects available to you online under GALILEO. See Section 1 above to learn how to find these. An article in an appropriate online reference book would make a good starting point for your research, for the same reasons that an article in a print reference book would.

Look at the spine of the reference book where you have found this article and note the call number. Find the area where this call number would be among the Book Stacks in the Henderson Library. **Look on the shelves around this call number area; you may find books that would be useful for your research.**

You can also do an “Exact Search” by call number in our catalog, [https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/](https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/). This would put you into a list, in call number order, of all the books that our library owns, whether they are in the Book Stacks on the open shelves or not.

Remember that the periodicals in the Henderson Library are arranged according to the same call number system. **Browse in the periodicals whose call numbers start with the same two letters as that of the reference book you used. You may find some articles that will help with your research.**
Anytime that you find a book or article relevant to your topic, check to see if it has footnotes, endnotes, a list of works cited, a bibliography, a list of suggestions for further reading, or something else that will guide you to other sources of information on your topic. Things identified in this way are especially likely to be good sources to use in your research, because they have been evaluated and found to be worthwhile, at least by the author of the book or article where they are cited.
SECTION 3
Find Books, Government Documents, and Audiovisual Materials That Deal With Your Topic

STEPS:

a. Look up your topic in the library catalog, doing a keyword search.
b. Try to find the subject heading(s) for your topic, and do a search on those subject headings.
c. Obtain from the library the materials that you have found listed in the catalog.
d. If you want a book that our library does not have, get it through GIL Express. If it is not available that way, get it through ILLiad (Interlibrary Loan).

To get a list of books, government documents, and audiovisual materials on your topic in our library, you would access the library catalog (the searchable electronic list of things our library owns). It is located at https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu.

There are two forms of our library catalog: the Classic GIL and GIL-Find. Classic GIL is much easier to use when you are looking for a specific known item (Section 1 above, under “Books,” tells you how to do this). However, if you are just trying to find out what books we have on a certain subject, you may find it much easier to use GIL-Find; many people do. Both of these options will always be available to you, and you may choose whichever one you prefer. Below, we will first describe the process of researching a topic using GIL-Find (Alternative #1); then we will describe the process, using Classic GIL (Alternative #2).
ALTERNATIVE #1: GIL-Find

If, when you enter the Henderson Library Catalog, you are not at the screen shown below, click “Try GIL-Find” in order to get there.

To look for things about a certain topic, it is best to choose “Title + Subject” from the pull-down menu after the search box. (You would not choose “Subject,” because to search that way – bearing in mind that there can be different names for the same subject; for instance, cars and automobiles mean the same thing – you would have to know what name for the subject librarians have used as the subject heading for cataloging it.)

The directions under the search box tell you how to formulate your search. For example, if you were looking for a topic which is always known by a set phrase, such as affirmative action, you would put it in quotation marks, e.g. “affirmative action”; this tells the computer to look for those two words side by side in that order.

When searching a complex topic – that is, one that involves more than one concept – you need to formulate your search statement using Boolean logic. For instance, suppose that your topic is “how the President gets elected.” This topic might be expressed a little differently, for
example, “electing the president” or “presidential elections” or “voting for the president.” You can see that this topic consists of two concepts, president and electing, which may also be expressed as voting. You combine the concepts with what is known as a Boolean operator, AND: e.g. president AND electing. This says find all of the records that contain both the word president and the word electing. To take account of the fact that voting is another way of saying electing, you can combine the two words with another Boolean operator, OR, and put them in parentheses: e.g. president AND (electing OR voting). This says find all the records that contain the word president, along with either the word electing or the word voting. But you still need to find a way to capture the different grammatical forms of words: president or presidential, elect or election, vote or voting. This can be done by using what GIL-Find calls a wildcard (elsewhere, it is often called truncation). To do this replace the varying endings of the word with a truncation sign – in this case, an asterisk (*) after the last letter that is found in each of the forms that you want to capture. Now the search statement looks like this: president* AND (elect* OR vot*) –
The first screen of results looks like this:

Notice how the options in the left-hand column allow you to narrow your search to get more precisely what you want. You may decide that one of the options under “Topics” best expresses what you need – e.g., “Presidential elections”; if so, you can select that. Or maybe you want only those books that fall within the subject area of political science, call number range J; you can select that. You can narrow your list of results by format, by language, or in a variety of other ways.
You can move from a keyword search to a subject heading search. The advantage of doing so is that with a subject heading search, you can be more certain of getting whatever the library has on your topic, not just those things that happened to word the topic in the same way you did. To do this, pick an item from your list of results from the keyword search which sounds, from its title, like it is exactly on topic. Click on the title and you will get a fuller record. For instance, the fuller record for number 2 on the above list of results looks like this:

Under “Subject,” the subject headings are listed; notice that they are hypertext links. One of these is “Presidents – United States – Election”; if this is just what you wanted, click on that and it will give you a list of all the items in our library that have that subject heading.

Note that to the right of this fuller record is a list of “Similar Items”; this provides another way to find additional information on your topic.
ALTHERATIVE #2: Classic GIL

Go to our library catalog at https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/. If you enter at GIL-Find, click on “Classic GIL Search.” “Then click on “Keyword Search.” You will get a screen that looks like this:

Note that you can connect the different lines with Boolean operators AND, OR, or NOT by selecting your choice between the lines. On each line, there is a pull-down menu offering the options “all of these,” “any of these,” or “as a phrase.” “All of these” is equivalent to connecting the words on that line with AND. “Any of these” is equivalent to connecting them with OR. You would use “As a phrase” if you were searching something always known by a set phrase, such as “affirmative action.” Also on each line is a pull-down menu where you can choose in which part of the record you want to find your search terms. A question mark (?) here is the equivalent of an asterisk (*) in GIL-Find, and indicates wildcard or truncation; thus, by typing president?, you can get president, presidents, or presidential. The search entered here is the same as the search demonstrated in GIL-FIND: president* AND (elect* OR vot*). Click on “Go.”

You will see a list of books, government documents, audiovisual materials, and other items that match your search. This list will tell you practically everything you need to know to
find an item, including the location, the call number, and whether or not it is checked out.
You may notice that many of the call numbers on this list are very similar. In that case, you have probably identified the call number area for your subject. You might want to go straight to that area on the shelves and just see what's there.
From the list, select one book that looks like it would be useful for research on your topic. (Not all of the results that you get will be highly relevant to your subject. The computer retrieves any records that contain the words you search, regardless of how these words are used.) Click on the title of the book. You will bring up a fuller record. This gives you information that you will need to evaluate the work (such as the date and the publisher), and to cite it if you use it in your research. You may want to go ahead and print this screen out.
In the fuller record, look for the field marked "Subject(s)." There the subject headings that librarians have used to catalog this item are listed. Note that they are hypertext links. **Choose the subject heading that most closely fits the topic you are researching; click on it.** This will put you into an alphabetical list of subject headings. Note that some of them include subheadings. The column labeled "Titles" tells you how many books there are in the library cataloged under each subject heading. To get a list of these, click on a subject heading. You can always return to the list and make another choice, by clicking "Back."

### Institution Name: Georgia Southern University

**Search Request:** Subject Browse = Presidents United States Election

**Search Results:** Displaying 1 through 25 of 25 entries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Headings</th>
<th>Headings Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>136 Presidents United States Election</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Presidents United States Election</td>
<td>Sears list of subject headings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 Presidents United States Election 1800</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 Presidents United States Election 1824</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 Presidents United States Election 1828</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 Presidents United States Election 1832</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 Presidents United States Election 1840</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 Presidents United States Election 1860</td>
<td>LC subject headings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the locations for materials owned by our library are listed below:

$ Book Stacks: these are on open shelves in the Henderson Library. You can retrieve them yourself. The catalog record tells you which floor the book is on. Books are in call number order on each floor. Remember that the call number arrangement is an arrangement by subject, and don’t forget to look at other books near your book on the shelves, to see if they will be helpful to you.

$ Government Documents are on the first floor in the library building.

$ Automated Retrieval Collection (ARC): These books are in storage within the library building, and can be retrieved within a few minutes. To request one of these books, click on “Request” at the top of the catalog record. On the screen that comes up, enter your Eagle ID number, PIN number, and last name and click “Login to my account.” (If you do not yet have a PIN number, enter just your Eagle ID number and last name, and click on “Get my PIN”; your PIN number will be emailed immediately to your Georgia Southern email account.) Under “Please Choose the Type of Request,” select “Automated Retrieval Collection” from the pull-down menu and click on “OK.” You will be asked to reconfirm your Eagle ID number before you submit. If your request was successful, go to the library’s Circulation Desk to pick up your book. If you have any problems doing this, ask for help at the Circulation Desk.

$ Online – Electronic Resources: These materials are available in full text online. Click on the title to get the fuller record. Then click on the “Linked Resource” field. You may need to sign up for an e-book service in order to view this item. If the e-book service is NetLibrary, you have to sign up for the service from a computer in the Henderson Library. Thereafter, you will be able to access books from NetLibrary from computers anywhere.
Through the GIL Universal Catalog, you are now able to borrow books from any library within the University System of Georgia, almost as easily as you can borrow books from our own library! This is a wonderful benefit for you, because it gives you access to many more books, including those at the University of Georgia, which has a much larger library than Georgia Southern does. From within the Henderson Library Catalog, click where it says “GIL Universal Catalog,” or go directly to GIL Universal Catalog at https://giluc.usg.edu/. Notice that the GIL Universal Catalog looks the same as the Henderson Library Catalog except that the colors are different. You can search it in the same ways that you search our catalog.

When you identify a book that you want to borrow, click on the title to get a fuller record. Then click on “GIL Express Request.” On the screen that then appears, select Georgia Southern University from the pull-down menu beside the first blank. On the second line, put in your Eagle ID number. On the third line, put in your PIN number (if you do not yet have a pin, fill in all the other lines and click on “Get My PIN” below; your PIN number will be emailed to your Georgia Southern email account immediately). Put your last name on the fourth line, and click on “Logon to my Account.”

On the next screen, click on “OK” under “GIL Express Request.” The record for the item you want to borrow will appear, with a request for you to confirm your Eagle ID number. Do that and click on “Submit Request.” We will notify you by email when your GIL Express book is
here for you to pick up at the Circulation Desk. It is checked out to you for a month. When you are finished with it, return it to the Henderson Library Circulation Desk, and we will ship it back to the library it came from. (Or, for that matter, you could return it to any library in the University System of Georgia, and it would be shipped back to its home library.)
SECTION 4
Find Periodical Articles from Databases

STEPS:
a. Determine what broad subject-area your topic would fall under.
b. Look at the databases that are automatically selected by GALILEO in that subject area, and consider whether they are appropriate for your search. Consider whether it is appropriate to include any additional databases in your search, as well.
c. Design an effective search.
d. If you see Descriptors, Subject Headings, or Subject Thesaurus Terms that describe what you are looking for, click on them to find all that the database contains with that subject heading.
e. Look at your results. If they are not satisfactory, redesign your search and try again.
Choose Appropriate Databases

There are over 400 databases available for Georgia Southern students, faculty, and staff to use. They cover many different subjects. To reach these databases, go to the Henderson Library homepage (http://library.georgiasouthern.edu), then click on GALILEO, second line down in the center section.

If you access any of these databases from off-campus, you must enter your MyGSU username and password to certify that you are a Georgia Southern student, faculty, or staff member, and therefore licensed to use them. GALILEO is accessible by logging into MyGeorgiaSouthern and clicking GALILEO on the left hand side or by searching the Discover service located on the library’s main page.

Clicking the GALILEO Articles/Databases tab on the library’s main page will allow you to access and search GALILEO databases while on campus only.
When you click on GALILEO (second line down in the center section of the Henderson Library homepage at http://library.georgiasouthern.edu/), you will see the screen below as the default. You probably do not want to select “Search” from the yellow bar on this screen to do your search: it does not tell you what database(s) you are searching, so you do not know if you are getting the best results for your needs (moreover, this particular search feature is often down!). If you are looking for a particular source, e.g., “News” or “Encyclopedias,” select the yellow bar marked “Browse by Type.” If you know of a specific database by name that you want to use, select “Databases A-Z,” then look it up alphabetically.
To choose an appropriate database for your topic, start at the “Browse by Subject” screen above. (If you are at some other screen within GALILEO, you can choose “Browse by Subject” from the yellow bar.) Select the broad subject area that best fits your research topic, and click on it. You will get a list of more specific subject areas. For instance, if you click on “Social Sciences,” you will get this:
Then select the more specific subject area that is most appropriate for your research topic. You will get a list of every database that might be relevant to that subject area. For instance, the list for “Psychology” looks like this:

At the top of the list of databases, you see “Try these first.” If you scroll down, you will see “Other databases in this category.”

To find out more about a database, click the word “more” at the end of the brief description following the database listing. This will give you the sort of information that you need to know in order to decide whether the database is a good one for purposes of your research: the subjects covered, the source of the information contained, the dates of publication covered, how often it is updated, and the intended audience.
It is possible to search in a subject area over multiple databases at once. This is not always advisable, however, because for many topics, you will get more results than you can easily cope with, and many of these will be of little use to you; it is better to do your search in a specific database that you know will have the sort of thing that you need. However, if you want to search multiple databases at once, click on “Subject Search” in the gray bar.
Design a Computer Database Search for Your Topic

Definitions

It is a good idea to review these terms before you start trying to find an article (even if you think you already know what they mean). If you get confused by these words as you follow the directions here, you can refer back to these definitions.

*database*: a searchable collection of information on the computer. Usually, you find articles by searching databases. Sometimes, the articles will be in full-text within the database. But at other times, the database will only let you know that certain articles exist, and it is up to you to find them outside the database.

*record*: all of the information that the database provides about a particular article or other item. The record is divided up into **fields**. Each **field** provides a different type of information about the article; some common fields are **title**, **author**, **subject**, **journal name**, and **abstract**. The **abstract** is a short summary of the article, and reading it will help you to determine whether an article is really relevant for your purposes, before you go to the trouble of obtaining it. Often, you have the opportunity to limit your search to particular **fields** of the **record**; this will help you do a search that yields results that are more likely to be on target.

*citation*, sometimes also called a **reference**: all of the information that you need in order to find an article, or to cite it in your paper or project. This includes the author(s) and title of the article; the title of the periodical in which it appeared; the date when it was published; the volume number, and also, in some cases, the issue number, in which it appeared; and the pages.

*vendor*: the company that packages information into a database, makes it searchable, and sells to us the license that enables us to make it available for use by you, a student, faculty, or staff member at Georgia Southern. Each vendor designs its own search interface. Thus, you will see that sometimes the search screens look different for different databases. If the search screens look the same for several different databases, they are probably from the same vendor. A number of our databases come from a vendor called EBSCOhost; you will quickly learn to recognize and use the EBSCOhost search screen.

*Boolean operators*: words that you use to draw a relationship between the search terms in your search. The two most commonly used (and most useful) Boolean operators are **AND** and **OR**.

– **AND** between two terms in the search statement tells the computer to find records that contain **both** of those terms.
– **OR** between two terms in the search statement tells the computer to find records that contain **either** the one term **or** the other. You would use it when there are several different terms that might be used for the concept you are looking for.

Different vendors have different ways of handling **AND** and **OR**. Some require that they be all in capital letters, as shown here. Others don’t require capitals; it is a good idea to get in the habit
of always putting Boolean operators in capitals, since those that don’t require capitals are generally not case-sensitive at all. Some vendors’ databases automatically assume an AND if your search statement includes two words with nothing between them. Others automatically assume an OR. Yet others treat two adjacent words as a phrase. Some require that you put two or more words in quotation marks if you want them to be searched as a phrase. To find out how the database you are using handles Boolean operators, you must look at the search screen and the help screens. Sometimes search screens will have a pull-down menu between search boxes, from which you can select the Boolean operator to connect the two boxes.

*truncation* is a means of telling the computer to look for all the different grammatical forms of a word and all the different words that are formed from the same stem. For instance, if you want to get vote, voting, votes, voter, and vote-getter, you would have to truncate. This is done by putting a truncation sign in place of the last letter that is the same in all the different words you want to capture. The truncation sign varies in different vendors’ databases. Some commonly used truncation signs are *, ?, and !. You will need to check the help screens to find out what the truncation sign is in the database you are using. If the truncation sign is *, you would capture all the words listed above by truncating to vot* in this example. Occasionally, the word wildcard is used to mean the same thing as truncation.

*descriptor or subject heading:* a term that catalogers have assigned to a record to say what it is about. Usually, the descriptors or subject headings are ‘hot links’ in records. Some databases will list the descriptors that occur frequently in your results, in a column to the left of the list of results. If you see a descriptor that is exactly what you want, click on it to get all records that have been assigned that descriptor.

*periodical:* anything that is published over and over again on a regular basis. Magazines, journals, and newspapers are all types of periodicals. Usually, a periodical has a number of different articles, by different authors, in each issue. The word ‘journal’ is often used to mean the same thing as periodical, although it can also have a more specialized meaning – specifically, a scholarly or professional periodical.

*GALILEO:* the collection of databases that is available to you as a Georgia Southern student, faculty, or staff member. GALILEO is found only through institutions in the state of Georgia. Properly speaking, GALILEO refers to the collection of databases that are funded by the state of Georgia. However, to save you from having to look in more than one place for databases, we have listed under “GALILEO” all of the databases available to you, whether they are funded by the state, by this particular university, or some other way. To use any of these databases from off-campus, you will need to put in the GALILEO password. To get the GALILEO password, go to the Henderson Library homepage at [http://library.georgiasouthern.edu/](http://library.georgiasouthern.edu/); select “Your Library Account and GALILEO Password”; enter your Eagle ID number, PIN number, and last name and click “Login to my account” (if you do not yet have a PIN number, enter just your Eagle ID number and last name, and click on “Get my PIN”; your PIN number will be emailed immediately to your Georgia Southern email account); on the screen that comes up, click on the word “Request” at the top; the next screen should tell you the GALILEO password; if it does not, select “GALILEO Password” from the pulldown menu; if you have any trouble getting the GALILEO password, call the Circulation Desk at (912) 478-5647.
HOW TO DESIGN A COMPUTER SEARCH:

1. You may want review the definitions given above.
2. Analyze your research topic into key concepts.
3. For each key concept, think of synonyms or related concepts.
4. Eliminate any words that would not help your search.
5. Connect the key concepts with AND.
6. Connect synonyms or related concepts with OR.
7. Truncate words that might occur in different forms.
8. Consider whether you want to limit the search for any or all of your terms to a particular field in the records.
9. Do the search that you have designed for your topic.
10. Look through the results to see which ones are truly useful to you.
11. Look at the descriptors in records you have retrieved or beside your results list. If you see one that is just what you want, click on it to get all records with that descriptor.

When doing a computer search, you have to bear in mind that the computer cannot read your thoughts. It can only match exact strings of letters. When you express your topic in certain words, the computer cannot think, as you can, of all the other words that might be used to say the same thing.

**Analyze your research topic into key concepts.** (For example, if your topic is presidential elections, the key concepts are “president” and “elections.”) It helps to draw columns on a piece of paper, and put each concept at the head of a column.

**For each of your key concepts, think of as many terms as you can that mean the same thing or something similar, or that represent a concept related to the key concept.** In some of the articles that you would want to locate, one or more of these concepts may sometimes be expressed in words different from those you have put at the top of the columns. It helps to write these down in the columns below your key concepts. Be sure that any concept you put is so similar that it would occur in articles that are highly likely to be relevant to your topic. For example, if one of your concepts is *Moby Dick*, you would not list “book” as a related concept; so many other books exist besides *Moby Dick* that most of the results you retrieve would have nothing to do with that book. On the other hand, the author of that book, Herman Melville, is a related concept – any article on Melville is likely to shed light on Moby Dick, his best-known and greatest work.

**Eliminate any words that you would not want to include in your search statement,** either because they are too distantly related to your basic concepts, or because they are part of a phrase which includes another word which is so distinctive that it alone would retrieve records on your concept.
You want to avoid using strings of words in the computer as much as possible, since in some databases, the computer is required to match the whole string, word-for-word, and in others, the computer pulls up all the records containing any of the words. Hence, if you have a concept normally expressed in a multi-word phrase, you might want to include in your search only the most distinctive word (the one that would appear in very few contexts besides the one you want). For instance, you could just type moby to get articles about Moby Dick. You would certainly not want to type just dick, because the name “Dick” appears in many contexts besides “Moby Dick.”

Connect the key concepts with AND in your search statement. AND is often described in technical jargon as a Boolean operator. For instance, if you are trying to find out about symbolism in Moby Dick, you could do the search moby AND symbolism.

Take into account the alternative words for each concept, in order to pull in more records that are relevant to your topic. In the search statement, you would connect these with OR, another Boolean operator. These are the words that you wrote beneath the key concepts in your columns. For example, if your topic is the symbolism in Moby Dick, and you decide that “imagery” and “metaphor” are related concepts that would get results you want, you would combine the three words with OR, like this: symbolism OR imagery OR metaphor.

Combine with AND the groups of related words that are connected with OR. If you are doing your search in a single search box, put the OR groups in parentheses in order to distinguish them from the AND groups. E.g. (moby OR melville) AND (symbolism OR imagery OR metaphor) means “Find all the records that contain either the word moby or the word melville, along with either the word symbolism or the word imagery or the word metaphor.”

Truncate in order to capture different forms of words in your search. For instance, if one of your concepts is “voting,” an article entitled “How America Votes” may be highly relevant. To get different forms, you put a marker called a truncation sign in place of the first letter that would be different in each form of the word. If the truncation sign is an asterisk (*), you would truncate vot* in order to retrieve vote, votes, voted, and voting.

When you have planned your search, you are ready to do it in an appropriate database.
Now we will perform a search in a specific database, in order to see what it actually looks like on the computer. We will use *Academic Search Complete*, a general database (covering all different subjects) that is put out by the vendor EBSCOhost. *Academic Search Complete* is often a good database to start with, no matter what your research topic. Many of our other databases will look the same as this one because they are also put out by EBSCOhost. To get to *Academic Search Complete*, go to the Henderson Library homepage at [http://library.georgiasouthern.edu/](http://library.georgiasouthern.edu/); choose “GALILEO” (second line down in the center section of the page); select “Databases A-Z”; then select *Academic Search Complete*. The basic search screen looks like this:
It is better to do an advanced search because this allows you to look for your search terms in a particular field and therefore, to get results that are more likely to be on target. Select “Advanced Search” from the line beneath the search box. Note that there are a number of options under “Limit your results.” You can select “Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals” if you want to get only the most reliable and scholarly information. You could limit your search to “Full Text,” although you probably do not want to do so, because that way you would miss articles that might be perfect for your research and very easy to find, even though they are not in full text in this particular database. You can limit your search by date, which you might want to do, for instance, if you are researching a subject where information becomes outdated quickly. There are also other ways to limit your search that you might want to consider, as well. This is a search designed to get scholarly articles about presidential elections in the United States. In the first two search boxes, I have limited the search terms to the title field in order to increase my chances of getting relevant results.
Here is a portion of the list of results. Note where it says “Subject Thesaurus Term” in the left margin; by clicking on the arrow beside this, you can get a list of subject headings that appear in your results. If you select one of these, then click on “Update,” you will get only those results of your search that have that subject heading. This is sometimes a useful way to hone down your list of results to get more nearly what you want.
To get more information about any article in the list of results, click on the title. The fuller record will look like this:

This record includes “Subject Terms”; if one of these seems to be exactly what you want, click on it to pull up all records in the database about that subject. Notice that there is also an “Abstract,” or short summary of the article; read this to see if the article is truly relevant for your purposes before you go to the trouble of obtaining it.

**Look through the results to see which ones are truly useful to you.** Some will deal with your topic, but will not offer very much useful information about it. Others will use the words you searched in different ways from what you had in mind. Since the computer cannot read your mind, some of your results will be irrelevant for just about any search you could design.

If very few of your search results seem useful to you, or if you do not get enough results, redesign your search. You may need to work more words into your search statement, or use different words. Finding the best search statement for your particular topic is often a process of trial and error.
Note that in your list of search results, some will be available in full text within the database. For others, there is a “Find It” button that will help you locate the article. This is discussed below in SECTION 5.
SECTION 5

Find a Periodical Article in the Library if it is Not In Full Text in the Database

STEPS:

a. Before you begin, you might want to review some definitions.
b. See if the article is available in full text in the database you are searching.
c. If it is not in full text, use the “Find It” button to find out how or whether the article is available to you.
d. If there is no “Find It” button, or if you find out about an article from someplace other than a database, look in the Henderson Library catalog to see if we have the periodical containing that article, for the volume and date when the article was published.
e. If so, obtain the article – from online, from the Periodical Stacks, or from the Automated Retrieval Collection.
f. If the library does not have the article, either in print form or online, you can order it through Interlibrary Loan.

Definitions

*Citation*, sometimes also called a *reference*: all of the information that you need in order to find an article, or to cite it in your paper or project. This includes the author and title of the article; the title of the periodical in which it appeared; the date when it was published; the volume number, and also, in some cases, the issue number in which it appeared; and the pages. In order to actually find the article in the library, you must, at minimum, note the name of the periodical, the volume, the date, and the pages. In addition, if the article is in print form you will also need the call number for the periodical, although it is not normally considered a part of the citation.

*Periodical*: Anything that is published over and over again on a regular basis, such as a journal, magazine, or newspaper. *Serial* is another word that you will occasionally encounter; it means much the same thing as *periodical*.

*Journal* usually refers to a scholarly or professional periodical, but sometimes (as in our library's catalog), it is used as a synonym for *periodical* in general. A scholarly or professional journal is usually *peer-reviewed*, meaning that specialists in the field of knowledge it covers have some say about which articles are published in it. An example of a journal would be the *Academy of Management Review*.

*Magazine*: A periodical that is not especially scholarly and is intended for non-specialized readers. An example of a magazine would be *GQ*. 
*Volume:* All the issues of a periodical that are published during a set period of time. For most periodicals, that period is a year. Volumes are numbered consecutively in order of publication. Many (but not all) periodicals number the pages consecutively throughout a volume, even though that volume consists of more than one issue. For instance, volume 81, issue 2 might start with page 133 if issue 1 of volume 81 contained pages 1-132. In most libraries, all of the issues in a single volume are bound together, so that they look like a book, or they are put on a single roll of microfilm. On the spine of the bound volume, or the box of the microfilm roll, you will see the call number for the periodical, the volume number, and the date range for that volume. If you obtain the article online, you may need to select the volume and issue in which the article appears.

*Issue,* sometimes referred to as a *number:* Each time that a periodical is published, it is a single *issue.* All of the issues published during a set period of time (usually, one year), constitute a volume. It is always a good idea to note down the issue number, as well as the volume number, for an article that you want to find and might want to cite in your paper. Some citation formats require issue numbers.

*Call number:* In the call number system we use, called the Library of Congress Classification System, this is a string of letters and numbers. It guides you to the exact location of an item on the library shelves. It is important that you make a note of the entire call number, not just the first part of it. In the case of a periodical, the call number will only get you to the spot where *all* the volumes of the periodical are found. It will not tell you which volume to look in; for that, you need the full citation.
Many articles are available in full text within the databases to which we have access. If the article is available in full text, it will usually say, in the results list, “Linked Full Text,” “Full Text HTML,” or “Full Text PDF.” This is a hypertext link that will take you directly to the article. PDF provides an exact image of the article as it was originally published. HTML provides the text of the article only.
In most of our databases, if the article is not available in full text, there will be a blue “Find It” button beneath the listing. If you click on this, it will tell you if the article is available online, in print form, or through interlibrary loan.

Beneath the heading “Online” are listed the databases to which we have access that have the article in full text online. If you click on a database, it will usually take you directly to the article. To find out if we have the article in print form in the Henderson Library, click on “GIL.” This will take you into the Henderson Library catalog and do a search to see if we have the periodical containing that article. If we do not have the article in either of these forms, you can click on “through Interlibrary Loan” and it will take you to the ILLiad logon screen. When you logon to ILLiad (even if you have to set up an ILLiad account first), it will automatically fill in the interlibrary loan request form for this article; all you have to do is click “Submit Request”!

Sometimes, you may find out about articles from databases that do not have them in full text and do not offer a “Find It” button. Furthermore, you will often find out about articles from printed sources which will not offer you online access to them. Thus, you need to know how to check the library catalog to find out if we have a periodical that contains an article that you want. Your aim is to find a call number for the periodical as a whole, not for the individual article title. In a print citation, the name of the periodical is usually underlined or printed in
italics, so that it looks like this: *Scientific American*. The title of the specific article is rarely underlined or put in italics; it is often placed in quotation marks, like this: "The Maturation of Frog Spawn."

In an online database, the name of the periodical appears in a field that is usually labeled "Source," "Publication," or "Journal Name."
To look up the call number for a periodical that contains an article, search the Henderson Library catalog. You can find it at https://gil.georgiasouthern.edu/ or by clicking on “GO” after the blank on the first line in the center section of the Henderson Library home page. It is easiest to use the Classic GIL Catalog to search for a periodical. Select “Exact Search” and mark “Journal Title” (remember, in this context, journal means the same thing as periodical). Then type in the exact title of the periodical, leaving off A, An, or The if it is the first word in the title.
If you get a list, you just have to guess which record is the periodical you are looking for. If you select the wrong one, you can always back up to the list and try another!
Click on the journal title to get a full record.

The “Volumes Owned” fields in this record tell you which volumes and years of this periodical we have in print form in the Henderson Library. Look to see if we have the volume and year in which the article you are seeking was published. The article by Ilana Pardes which we are using as an example appeared in volume 57 of *Comparative Literature* for 2005; our library does not have that in print form.
If the Henderson Library has electronic access to any volumes of the periodical, one of the “Location” fields will say “Online-Electronic Resources.” If you see that, click the blue “Find It” button at the top of the record to see what dates of this periodical we have online. Here is what that looks like for *Comparative Literature*:

Notice that the databases which provide online access to this periodical are listed; under each database the range of dates covered is given. Select a database that includes the date when the article you want was published. In subsequent screens, you will have to select the year, the number, and the article you want. You will be required to give the GALILEO password if you are doing this from off campus.

You can also find out if a periodical is available to us online by looking it up in “Electronic Journals A-Z,” available in the dark-blue bar at the bottom of the center section of the Henderson Library’s homepage, or at [http://sfx.galib.uga.edu/gso1/az/](http://sfx.galib.uga.edu/gso1/az/).

There are several places in the library where periodicals in print or microform might be located:

$ \textbf{Current periodicals}$, up to about a year old (i.e., the current volume), are shelved
in several rows of shelves. They are in alphabetical order by the name of the periodical. Those shelves lift up. The most current issue is on the top of the shelf, and the other recent issues are underneath the shelf.

$ \text{Periodicals older than a year (i.e., prior to the current volume) as far back as 2000 are in the Periodicals shelves on the first floor of the Henderson Library. They are in call number order. They are either bound into volumes or are on microform. Each volume has the volume number and date range on the spine.}$

$ \text{Issues of periodicals older than 2000 are in storage in the ARC (Automated Retrieval Collection). Ask for them at the Circulation Desk.}$

$ \text{Microfilm cabinets for newspapers.}$

If you need an article that is not available to you from the Henderson Library, either online or in print form, you can order it through interlibrary loan. To do this, you will need to sign up for an ILLiad Account if you do not already have one; this is quick, easy, and free of charge to you. When you log in to ILLiad, fill out and submit the form online that is titled “Article or Other Photocopy” (remember that this form is filled in automatically for you if you access ILLiad from the “Find It” button attached to an article record in a database). We will obtain the article and scan it to your ILLiad account; you will be notified by email when it is available there.
SECTION 6
Find Web sites

STEPS:

a. Use the Web last, not first, in your research. Don't confuse things carried on the Web with Web sites themselves.

b. Web sites must be carefully evaluated.

c. Take advantage of sources for pre-evaluated Web sites.

For most topics, the World Wide Web should be the last place that you look for information, not the first. That is because the Web is not subject to editorial evaluation during the publishing process, as most other sources of information are. Anyone with a little technical know-how can put anything on the Web – even children in elementary school. They may know what they are talking about – and then, again, they may not!

You need to distinguish between the Web, proper – that is, things that are published for the first time on the Web – and things that were first published somewhere else, and are merely brought to you via the Web. Most of the databases that we have for you to use are delivered on the Web, but were originally published elsewhere and therefore have undergone some editorial scrutiny.

For Web sites, it is more important than ever that you evaluate them carefully before using them in research, since no one has previously evaluated them for you (although you should be evaluating all the sources you use, not just web sites). For information about how to evaluate sources, see Section 7. Sometimes a careful look at the first part of the URL or web address (up to the first slash), which is called the domain, can help you to determine how reliable a Web site is. For information about the most common types of domains, see Section 7. Another thing to bear in mind when using the Web is that, with one click of the mouse, you can move to an altogether different Web site. At that point, you must do the evaluation all over again.

You might want to start by finding web sites that someone else has already evaluated and found to be reliable sources of information. See Section 1 above.
SECTION 7
Evaluating Your Sources

STEPS:

Ask the following questions about a source –

a. Is it a primary or a secondary source?
b. How relevant is a source to your research topic?
c. What type of source is it?
  $ Scholarly works
  $ Serious trade books and articles
  $ News sources
  $ Popular books and magazines
  $ Vanity publications
  $ Information published by a business or organization
d. Criteria for Evaluating a Source of Information
  $ Who is the author, and what qualifications does that person have to provide information on that topic?
  $ Who published the information or put it on the Web?
  $ How timely is the information?
  $ Is the information biased?
  $ Finally, use your independent judgment when you evaluate any source of information.
STEP A

**Distinguishing Between Primary and Secondary Sources**

**Primary sources** give you direct evidence about the topic that you are researching. **Secondary sources** tell you what someone else has thought about the topic. The distinction between primary and secondary sources is not a hard and fast one, but depends on what topic you are researching. For instance, if you are researching the symbolism in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, your primary source would be the novel *Moby Dick* itself, and a book about the symbolism in *Moby Dick*, written in 1890, would be a secondary source. On the other hand, if your research topic is nineteenth-century interpretations of *Moby Dick*, then the book written in 1890 would be a primary source. To use another example, a Web site put out by a company to extol the virtues of its product would not be very useful to you as a secondary source for reliable information on the product, because obviously the site would want to show its product in a favorable light. On the other hand, it might be a very valuable primary source if your research topic is advertising on the Web.

STEP B

**How Relevant Is a Source to Your Research Topic?**

Even the best-designed research will turn up some things that are irrelevant to your topic. This is especially true when you do a computer search, because computers cannot match a concept – they can only match an exact string of characters. If a word has several different meanings, you may retrieve records that use the word in another sense from the one you intend. If you are doing a full-text search, you will often retrieve articles where the words you searched are mentioned only in passing, instead of being substantively discussed. Use your judgment to determine which of the items that you retrieve in your search are truly relevant to your topic.
STEP C
What Type of Source Is It?

There are several different types of publications, and some are more valuable for research than others. The types that you will most often encounter are listed below (this list is loosely adapted from Janice R. Walker and John Ruszkiewicz, writing@online.edu [New York: Longman, 2000], pp. 12-15):

**Scholarly works.** These make some original contribution to knowledge. They are generally written by authors who have advanced education in the subject or are recognized experts in the field. Before being published, these works have been evaluated by others with specialized knowledge in the field, in other words, they have been peer reviewed. You can generally recognize scholarly writings because they cite other works — in footnotes, endnotes, in-text citations, and/or lists of works cited at the end. Often, you can tell from the publisher, whether or not the work is scholarly. Scholarly books are most often published by university presses or specialized scientific publishers. Scholarly periodicals are usually called journals. If the word “Journal” appears in the title of the periodical, it is usually a clue (although not an infallible one) that the periodical is scholarly; however, there are some scholarly journals without the word “Journal” in the title, and a few that are called “Journal” but are not scholarly (e.g. Ladies’ Home Journal)! Publishers of scholarly journals are usually university presses, specialized scientific publishers, or the professional societies for scholars in a field of study. When you see a scholarly publication, you can usually recognize it because the pages are not glossy and there are few advertisements and few pictures (unless pictures are necessary to make the author’s point). Also, as a general rule, a scholarly work will state the author’s affiliation, which will usually be a university or a research institute. Scholarly works are the best ones to use as secondary sources in your research, because steps have been taken to insure their reliability. Some scholarly journals are published on the Web, and, in time, more and more scholarly books will be published that way as well. Web sites whose domain is .edu originate from an educational institution; these may be scholarly works, although that is not guaranteed — they could equally well be the Web pages of students who have less knowledge than you do! On the other hand, it is possible that Web sites with .com domains could contain scholarly information. You will need to evaluate these sites carefully to determine just how reliable and “scholarly” they really are.

**Serious trade books and articles.** These are written for well-educated general readers who are not specialists in the subject. The authors usually have some credentials to write with authority on their topic. The works may or may not include citations, but they will usually give some good indication what sources
they draw on and how their conclusions have been reached. This may take the form of a list of works for further reading. Serious trade publications are based on research or specialized knowledge, and are generally reliable sources of information. Certain trade publishers are known for works of this sort (Knopf is a good example). Some periodicals which fall into this category are *The New York Review of Books*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Scientific American*.

**News sources.** These include newspapers, news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, news broadcasts, and news Web sites. Articles are written by reporters who are specially trained to get the news, but are not necessarily experts on the subjects that they write about. News sources are most often useful as sources of primary material in your research (for instance, reports of the events that you want to analyze in your research paper). We might also put into this category the large group of specialized news publications that are directed to people in specific professions, occupations, or fields of endeavor (for instance, *Business Week*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, or *Restaurant Business*).

**Popular books and magazines.** The authors usually have no special qualifications to write on the subject. (Or the qualifications they claim may be irrelevant or suspect; for instance, the authors of many pop psychology books will often put “Ph.D.” after their names, but if their Ph.D. is not in psychology or a related field, you have no reason to believe that they are knowledgeable on the subject.) Some examples of popular periodicals are *Essence*, *Cosmopolitan*, or *People Magazine*. You can usually recognize them by the glossy pages and large numbers of illustrations and advertisements. Popular works may or may not give accurate information, and, generally, you should not trust them as sources for serious research or cite them in college papers.

**Vanity publications.** These are any works that are self-published by the author. Certain presses are paid by authors to print their works. Authors will sometimes print their own works by desktop publishing. Nearly all personal Web pages are vanity publications. Always be extremely cautious about using vanity publications for your research. They may contain useful information or insights. In a few cases, they may even pioneer new ideas which are not yet accepted by the scholarly establishment, but which in time will be recognized as breakthroughs. But you will have to check information that you get from vanity publications in other, more widely recognized sources, and use your prior knowledge and your best judgment to decide if the ideas presented there represent worthwhile insights or just the vanity of the author.

**Information published by a business or organization.** These include advertising, corporate annual reports, any of the pamphlets or periodicals...
published by organizations, and company or organizational home pages on the World Wide Web. These works will certainly have a specific bias: they are intended to advertise or sell the products or services of the business or further the purposes of the organization. If you use them as sources of information, keep in mind that they are biased. You will find them most useful in your research as primary sources of information about the businesses or organizations that produce them.
STEP D
Criteria for Evaluating a Source of Information

You need to evaluate all information sources before you use them for your research. Much the same criteria are applicable for evaluating publications in any format. However, it is especially important that you evaluate Web sites before using them. Most print sources have undergone an editorial process in which they receive some sort of evaluation before they even reach the public; however, Web sites have not. Ask yourself the following questions when evaluating a source:

1. **Who is the author, and what qualifications does that person have to provide information on that topic?** See if the source tells you what kind of education, training, and experience the person has had that qualify her or him as an expert on the subject. What does the person do now? Does the person have an institutional affiliation that indicates a presumption of expert knowledge and experience? Especially in the case of an online source, is a means of contacting the author provided in case you have questions or reactions to the information or want to find out more about the author?

2. **Who published the information or put it on the Web?** In Step C, above, we discussed different types of publishers of hard copy, and the effect they should have on how you evaluate the source. For a Web page, you need to see what institution, organization, or business mounted the site on the Web. Take a close look at the Web address. The first part of the address preceding the first slash is the domain, or the location of the server where the information is stored. The last part of the domain name (for U.S. sites) indicates the type of organization that mounted this Web site. This will offer you a clue about what type of site you are dealing with and how to evaluate information that comes from it. Some common types of domains are:
An educational institution. Many sites in this domain will contain information from university departments, research institutes, and professors with expertise in their subjects; you can probably rely on this information. However, students often are allowed to mount personal home pages or their own class projects on the university Web site. You should not assume that these students know any more than you do.
.gov/ A federal government agency. The federal government provides information on a wide variety of topics, and it is usually reliable, although for some sites, you may have to allow for political biases.
A military force or agency. These sites are generally as reliable as government sites. Be aware, however, that some information may be withheld from these sites for security reasons.
.org/  An organization, usually non-profit. Consider the purpose of the organization, and how that might bias the information it dispenses.
.com/ A commercial site. Bear in mind that this site is likely to be advertising or trying to sell you a product. Some commercial sites allow subscribers to mount their personal web pages; you will want to approach these sites carefully to determine their reliability.
.net/  A site provided by a commercial Internet provider. Many sites in this domain are personal pages or other things that should be considered vanity publications. However, some sites in this domain may provide reliable information. Use the usual evaluation criteria to judge these sites.
3. How timely is the information? For a book or article, be sure to notice the date of publication. Think about whether this will affect the reliability of the information. Timeliness is more important in some fields of study than in others. A book about computer networks written in 2000 is already hideously outdated. On the other hand, a book written in 1890 may contain insights about the symbolism in *Moby Dick* that are just as valid as a book written today. Web sites often contain information that is only useful if it is updated regularly. A well-designed Web site should tell you when it was last updated — although, unfortunately, many of them do not.

4. Is the information biased? Anything that is written to advocate a certain position is likely to stress the information that supports that position and suppress or downplay information that does not. Be on the lookout for biases.

5. Finally, use your independent judgment when you evaluate any source of information. Does it make sense? Is the argument logical? Does the information agree with what you already know? Can you confirm the information from other sources?