

Finding Literature

Before you begin your research, it's a good idea to search the literature and see what other research has been done in your subject area. Primary sources will be most useful for this. If you're not familiar with your research topic, secondary literature can provide detailed background knowledge. The first challenge you'll come across is finding the relevant literature.

Primary Literature

- **Scientific papers.** Can be searched for using dedicated databases eg Web of Science and CAB abstracts. Check with your librarian what database is relevant to your subject. Search using key words, starting with broad terms and narrowing down. The results of your search will include a full reference for the paper, allowing you to track down the journal you require from your library, from the internet or through inter library loans.
- **Conference proceedings.** Can be difficult to locate. Search using dedicated databases eg ISI Proceedings or PapersFirst. Input the name of the conference into Google to check for official releases.
- **Research reports.** Many organisations, for instance DEFRA, publish full research reports on the internet and these can provide a valuable source of up to date information
- **Dissertations and theses.** Your department should have a list of past dissertations and PhD theses and may hold copies. Your university library will hold copies, but often these are kept in storage and require 24 hours to access. Accessing student research from other institutes can be difficult.

Secondary Literature

- **Books, websites, reviews in journals.** These will provide general background knowledge on your subject area. Be aware that the reliability of websites should be considered.
- **Books.** Your university library should have an electronic database for you to search. Start off with broad search terms then become more specific. If you have a budget for books, search on the internet for new or second hand sources.
- **Websites.** A search engine should provide relevant websites, depending on the search terms you enter. Be aware that the quality and reliability of websites should be investigated.
- **Reviews in journals.** Most commonly found whilst searching through databases for scientific papers on your research topic.