Finding Information For Your Essay Or Assignment
Today’s session

• Getting Started
• Find books on your topic:
  Hands on – library catalogue exercise
• Thinking about your topic – concepts and keywords
  Hands on – keyword exercise
• Finding journal articles on your topic:
  Library databases and Discover
  Search tips and techniques for databases
  Hands on - searching on a library database exercise
• Library Resources by Subject
• Other help
Getting Started

Look carefully at the essay question/assignment

- Are there any words or phrases you don’t understand?
- Try looking in the Library’s online or print dictionaries/encyclopaedias for your subject

What information do you have on this topic already?

- Check the reading list for the module/lectures
- Look at any references given during relevant lectures
- Look at references in your reading list books or bibliographies of reading list articles
Finding books on your topic

Searching the Library catalogue:

- The catalogue covers books, ebooks, journal titles (not article titles), DVDs
- Can search for specific items and by subject
- Only searches the titles, not individual chapters, so you need to use quite broad searches

Tip: There may not be a book on your exact topic but there may be a chapter within a book on a broader topic
Exercise 1

Search the Library catalogue to see what books and other material we have on your topic:

- Go to the Library web site [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/)
- Try some searches on keywords from your essay or assignment topic(s)

Tip  Remember that you are searching for book/journal titles so you need to use quite broad search terms
Thinking about your topic 1.

What types of information will you need to answer the question?
- Will you need a textbook to give you an idea of the main arguments? Remember there may not be books about your essay topic, but there might be relevant chapters within books.
- Will you need journal articles that show the academic research done in that area?
- Do you need facts, figures, data or case studies to illustrate your argument?
- Will there be useful information on the web?
Thinking about your topic 2.

- Write down your topic and note important **nouns** and **verbs**
- Break down nouns and verbs into **concepts**
- Think of **keywords** related to your **concepts**
- Think of **underlying concepts** to incorporate into your search
- Use **reference books** (dictionaries, thesaurus’, encyclopaedias etc.), to come up with more **keywords** and **synonyms** for your keywords
**Key concepts**

**Topic:** Is fracking a solution to rising gas prices in the UK?

**Key concepts:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
<th>Concept 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fracking</td>
<td>Gas prices</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Underlying concepts:**

1. Environmental impact of fracking
2. Gas prices effect on UK consumers
3. Imported energy
Concepts become the **keywords** you use in database searches:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
<th>Concept 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fracking</td>
<td>Gas prices</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fracture mapping</td>
<td>Natural gas prices</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydraulic fracturing</td>
<td>Petroleum industry</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural gas exploration</td>
<td>Crude oil</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use **MindView** (visual mind-mapping software) to organise your ideas and layout the relationships between your concepts.
Words you don't need to search for and why

**Topic:** Is fracking a solution to rising gas prices in the UK?

*is, a, to* - ignore because they are so common

*solution, rising* - ignore adjectives and words that indicate a relationship between two concepts
They may eliminate otherwise relevant results from your search

The more keywords you add to your search, the fewer results you will retrieve
Try the keywords exercise using your own topic or the one on the sheet

**Topic:** Are teenage girls influenced to diet by magazines and television programmes?

**Keywords:**
Finding journal articles on your topic

What is a library database? Website containing collections of information like:

- Journals and articles
- Conference papers
- Statistical data
- Book reviews

Can search across all of this content by searching for certain keywords in the database’s records.
Why use library databases?

1. Find information not freely available on the internet
2. Find information which has been assessed for quality by scholars and researchers
3. Find more relevant information more quickly with powerful search tools
Anatomy of a database: search bar and search options

**Search bars** - blank fields in which you will enter your keywords

**Basic search** – single bar for simple searches

**Advanced search** - more than one search bar for more sophisticated searches

**Search options** - check boxes and dropdown menus to help you set limiters and expanders

**Broaden or narrow** your search results with **limiters** and **expanders**

Control available articles by author, publication date, format, language or location
Find Full text button

- For databases where you can only read the abstract - click the **Find Full Text button**

- For articles where full-text access is not available – order through Birkbeck website as **interlibrary loans**

- Your online interlibrary loan account can be logged into from the **Other Libraries** tab on the library website
Library Resources by Subject

• See your **subject guides** for recommendations for individual databases and other resources from your subject librarian

  [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/subguides/](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/subguides/)

• If your subject is cross-disciplinary, we have many multi-disciplinary databases such as **JSTOR** and **Academic Search Complete**
Search multiple databases with Discover

Welcome to Birkbeck eLibrary

To search our e-resources (articles & more) click on Discover.
Please use your Birkbeck username and password
Simplest way to find journal articles on a topic is to do a **keyword search** on **Discover**

- Searches across **multiple journals** and **databases** covered by Birkbeck Library subscriptions
- **Log-in** with your **Birkbeck username** and **password** at the start of your search session
Search techniques

- **Truncation or stemming**: put an asterisk after the word stem
e.g. manag* will find management, managers, managing, managerial, manage, etc.

- **Phrase searching**: put exact phrases in quotation marks
e.g. “quantitative easing”
Search techniques: Boolean operators

- **Boolean operators** are used to connect your search terms.
- Put **AND**, **OR** and **NOT** in between your keywords in the database search bar to either narrow or broaden your search results.
- Normally found on the **advanced search** tab of library databases and Discover.
Search techniques: Boolean operators

Combining your keywords in a search:

- Join words that mean the same thing with **OR**
  
e.g. global warming **OR** climate change

- Join related concepts with **OR**
  
e.g. anorexia **OR** bulimia

- Join individual concepts with **AND**
  
e.g. Bullying **AND** girls
Exercise 3

Search the Academic Search Complete to find journal articles on your topic:

- Go to the Library web site [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/)
- Click on the eLibrary tab
- Click on the A- E tab and select Academic Search Complete
- Try some searches on keywords from your essay or assignment topic(s)
- Try out the Advanced Search and search techniques
Databases vs. Google Scholar

- Databases are curated by humans while Scholar is machine indexed
- Databases select journals to index on their reputation in their field
- Articles are mostly peer-reviewed (read and approved by other academics) before publication
- Database search interfaces are more advanced and help you get targeted results – Scholar only has a date filter
- Citations on Scholar can be incomplete and can only be saved or exported to referencing software one at a time
- Pdfs you find on Scholar may not be the final published versions
Searching the web 1.

Take care when using web sites as a source of information

*Why?*

- Because **anyone can put information on the Internet**
- It **may be inaccurate**, out of date or biased (e.g. trying to sell a product or promote a political or religious agenda)
- It may not be the **right level** for your essay or assignment (e.g. it may be aimed at schoolchildren or the general public)
- **Try not to use** a web site as the **sole source** of a piece of information – try to find another source to back it up
How to evaluate web sites carefully

Look for clues in the web pages such as:

• Author’s name, qualifications, affiliation
• Date the page was created or last modified
• Are there broken links?
• Is there advertising or sponsorship?
• Is it well-designed/are there spelling mistakes or other errors you can spot?
What about Wikipedia?

- Wikipedia can be a useful starting place, especially for a topic you are unfamiliar with.
- However, anyone can create and edit entries and this may lead to inaccuracies.
- **Don’t rely on it as the sole source** of piece of information – try to find it in another source as well.
- **References** and **further reading** can be very useful as a starting point.

e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sickle-cell_disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sickle-cell_disease)
Referencing your reading

- Check course/module handbook or Moodle module for guidance on referencing styles
- Library has books to help you once you know what style to use:
  Pears, R., & Shields, G. J. (2013). *Cite them right: The essential referencing guide* (9th ed.).
Using your reading in your essays

• We also have books in the Library that can help you with essay writing:

Other sources of help

Library website – bbk.ac.uk/lib/

Study Skills Resources - online subject guide for books and websites

Library and Information Skills Moodle module

Saturday Workshops

Your Subject Librarian - One to one appointment
Questions?