Susanna Wesley Library

Independent Learning Guide
Sixth Form
Contents

Introduction 3
Ask questions about the task 4
Locate sources of information 6
Pick the best information 8
How will I use the information? 9
Making notes 10
Answer the question 11
Plagiarism and how to avoid it 12
Referencing 13
BETter - how can I improve? 15

Please note:
Some of the websites mentioned in this document may not be available in school
Introduction

This guide will help you **improve your grades** by becoming more information literate. It introduces and explains techniques for finding and using information to help you carry out your assignments and research projects.

*Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner (CILIP, 2011)*

At Kent College we use a system of 6 steps to guide you through the process of developing your research skills. The process is not linear and you may have to go back and think about a previous step before moving on. The steps are represented by a picture of a hand, and you will find this in your student planner.

Using this system will help you:
- Decide which questions you need to ask
- Find information quickly and efficiently
- Structure your work
- Produce high quality work
- Get better grades
Ask questions about the task

What are the main ideas of the task?
What do I know already?
What do I need to find out?
What are the keywords that will help me?
Who is it for and why?


You may be able to choose your topic OR You may have a topic given to you

Own choice topic
Choose something that you are interested in
Is there enough information available?
Is the information easily accessible?
If not, consider amending your topic

Allocated topic
Read through the assignment title and any other related information you have
Look up words/terms you don’t know
Read an overview of your topic in an encyclopedia or general reference work for a better idea of what you need to find out

Your project
What are your project objectives?
What do you need to find out?
What are your core questions?
Do you need to survey/collect data?

Choosing your own topic
When you have chosen your topic it is a good idea to write a proposal for your teacher who can then ensure that you are on the right track. It should include:

♦ Your topic title
♦ Your objectives
♦ A description of how you are going to achieve these
♦ How you will present it
Break the topic down into parts and make a list of the areas that you need to find out about

Try brainstorming using a mind map

See: “Mind Maps for Kids” by Tony Buzan, in the LRC at 371.3
Use mindmapping software such as MindView on the school network or online software such as http://bubbl.us - this is an example on the topic of “the cultural significance of The Simpsons”

Study Skills

“The Study Skills Handbook”, by Stella Cottrell in the Library at 371.3
Skills4Study.com http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/sitemap.asp
Skills4uni (interactive tutorial) http://www.skills4uni.bham.ac.uk/

If you need more help or advice talk to your teacher or librarian
Finding resources

If you need reliable information, or you need to read around a subject and put it into context, a book may be the best place to start. The Internet may be the best place if you need very up-to-date information, specific facts, or an image or video. If you need academic research, newspaper reports or case studies for your topic, then a database would be the best option. You will get more marks if you show that you know how to locate and use information from a variety of resources.

Possible resources include:

- **Encyclopedias** (printed or online) – good for an overview
- **Books** - specifically on the subject, including dictionaries and textbooks, and more general books on broader aspects of your topic
- **Newspapers and journals** (magazines) - these can be printed or online
- **The Internet** – all kinds of information is available, but not all is reliable, up-to-date and unbiased
- **Videos and audio** (podcasts)
- **Experts** in the field you are interested in – you may be able to contact them
- **Biographies** - background of those who work in the field
- **Fiction** - for an emotional “feel” for your subject

From the Homepage of the school Intranet

Check out **SearchStar**, the Library database, to find books, DVDs, websites and articles for your topic.
Paid for Online Resources can be found on the Website Passwords page on the Intranet - USE THEM!

Using the resources to find the information

- Use your keywords and key questions to help you find the information
- Use the contents page and index, sitemap and webpage tabs
- Use the Bibliography/References/Further reading sections for more resources
- Check your information with another source

Google

Use advanced search tools

www.google.com/advanced_search
You can reach this page by clicking the gear symbol on your list of results

Google Scholar – for academic articles
http://scholar.google.co.uk

Google Books – for online, searchable texts
http://books.google.com

Try other search engines such as AltaVista, Yahoo and Bing - they will often give different results

Think of different spellings and words

UK/US spelling: colour/color

Similar words: pram, stroller, buggy, pushchair

Broader and narrower words
eg if your topic is “planets” then Solar System will give you more results, and Mars will give you fewer

Use AND, OR and NOT to search for specific information in databases

Keep up to date

Netvibes - create your own start page with RSS feeds from blogs, news and gadgets www.netvibes.com
Google Reader - collect many RSS feeds in one place www.google.com/reader
Twitter - collaborate with others online, find out information http://twitter.com

Pick the best information

Is the information at the right level?
What are the main ideas I am looking for?
Who are the author and publisher - are they qualified to write about this topic?
Is the information relevant?
Is it up-to-date / accurate / unbiased?
Does it help to answer my questions?

These questions should be asked about any resource, but generally there are more problems using the Internet. Not everything on the Internet is reliable. It can be a great source of information, but it is also a great source of misinformation (mistakes), disinformation (lies) and propaganda (bias).

How would you rate the website to save the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus from extinction? [Website]

Wikipedia has stated that both the Queen and Vernon Kay were dead and that David Beckham was Chinese! [Website]

Evaluating websites
If you struggle to answer the questions at the top of this page the website may not be a good one for your research.

Wikipedia can be a good starting point for research but remember that it can be edited by anyone:
- Are there any warnings from Wikipedia showing concern about it?
- Does the article include lots of references?
- Can you follow them up and look at the author’s sources for yourself?
- Use the history and discussion pages to help you evaluate the information.

Use trusted sites
Use sources of information whose reputation you can trust, and where an expert has provided the details. For example:
- The BBC for news
- The Met Office for weather
- Hansard for parliamentary proceedings
- Subscription services such as Amazing Grades, Infotrac Student Edition etc

See: “Getting Critical”, by Kate Williams at 371.3 in the Library
Internet Detective at [Website]
How will I use the information?

What shall I make a record of?
How shall I record it?
Have I got all the details for my bibliography?
Have I got all the information I need?
What do I think about it?
Do I have other questions now?

Reading for information

Skimming and scanning
Not everything has to be read word by word
Skim through a resource quickly to decide if it is going to be useful and to get the main ideas
Scan for keywords and facts

Speed-reading
Learn to read faster with “Buzan’s Study Skills Handbook” by Tony Buzan, at 371.3 in the Library
Online speed-reading aids like http://www.zapreader.com/ may also help

SQ3R is a technique for in-depth reading
SURVEY - Before you read survey the resources. Skim to decide if it is going to be useful, looking at the contents, introduction and summary

QUESTION - Ask questions while you are surveying, or use the key questions you have identified for your assignment. These questions will be your study goal to help you understand the information

READ - When you begin, look for answers to the questions you have. Look out for headings, important text and captions for images and graphs. Read a section at a time and check your understanding. Re-read if necessary

RECITE - Recite or recall the information to ensure you have understood the main points and see if you have any new questions. Make notes or draw a mind map

REVIEW - Review is an ongoing process to help you remember what you’ve read. You can re-read, expand your notes, discuss with a friend or teach someone else

See: “Reading and Making Notes”, by Jeanne Godfrey at 371.3 in the Library
How will I use the information?

Making notes or mind maps

**Don’t miss out this step** – making notes ensures that you understand the information, think about it, and helps you decide your own opinion, standpoint, or direction. Doing it properly will give you a better end result

- Don’t read anything for your study or project without making notes
- Never listen to a talk or lecture or video without taking notes
- Keep a record of the source (see the section on Referencing)
- Summarise the overall meaning into 1 or 2 sentences
- Highlight main points or make notes in the margins of books and papers - provided they are yours
- Develop your own shorthand and abbreviations so you can write down main points quickly
- Use bullet points, numbered lists, tables or mind maps if you find it makes your notes clearer
- Leave plenty of space between points and use wide margins in case you want to change or add anything.
- Tidy up your notes while they’re fresh in your mind to make sure you’ll still be able to read and understand them later!

**Online tools**

Organise and share your work with:

**Evernote** - to save notes, images, webpage clippings [www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com)

**Dropbox** – to share data between computers and your phone. Share folders with others [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)

**Diigo and Delicious** – to save online bookmarks, accessible anywhere [www.diigo.com](http://www.diigo.com) and [http://delicious.com](http://delicious.com)

**Graphic organisers**

A graphic organiser is a template to help you organise and understand information and come to a conclusion. Your teachers will have given them to you but you can make your own too. Look at some at: [http://www.graphic.org/goindex.html](http://www.graphic.org/goindex.html) [http://www.readingquest.org/strat/](http://www.readingquest.org/strat/)

The easiest graphic organiser is to have 2 columns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause</td>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer the question

What is the best way to present this information?
Who is the audience?
What would be the best format for them to understand it?
Have I answered all the questions?
Have I checked everything?

Presenting what you’ve learnt
Make sure that you follow any instructions you have been given on how to present your work. Is your final work an essay?

Essay structure
- Title page
- Contents page
- Summary
- Introduction
- Main text
- Conclusions
- Glossary
- Bibliography
- Acknowledgements

The writing process
- Plan
- First draft
- Read through
- Edit and cut
- Redraft
- Bibliography
- Spell check
- Proof read (even if you spell checked)

A different format?

Audience – who will read, listen to or watch your work?
Form – how will it be presented? Written forms include letters, posters and advertisements. Spoken forms include speeches, conversations and performance poems.
Function – what is your purpose? Are you presenting to entertain, instruct, inform or persuade?

Ways to present
- PowerPoint
- Talk
- Story
- Play script
- Designed object
- Artistic work
- Poster
- Experiment

Online presentation
- Prezi - create zooming presentations - http://prezi.com
- Voicethread – collaborate with others, different voices in a slideshow - http://voicethread.com
- Glogster - create an online interactive poster - www.glogster.com
- Animoto - great for visual presentations - http://animoto.com
- Issuu - create interactive page turning booklets - http://issuu.com
- Livebinder - collect websites together in one place - http://livebinders.com

See: “The Academic Essay”, by Derek Soles at 808.4 in the Library
Plagiarism and how to avoid it

To plagiarise is to take the work or an idea of someone else and pass it off as one’s own.  
(Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 1999)

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and although it may not be intentional, there are ways to prevent it.  You need to know how to do 4 things:

1. How to summarize
2. How to paraphrase
3. How to use quotations
4. How to cite sources

Incorporate other people’s work into your own writing

Summarising - putting the main idea(s) into your own words, only including the main points. Summaries are much shorter than the original and give an overview. You must acknowledge the original source.

Paraphrasing – putting a passage from source material into your own words. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage. You must acknowledge the original source.

Quotations – these must exactly match the source document and be in quotation marks. You must acknowledge they are the words of the original author. They should usually not be more than 1 or 2 sentences, and used to prove a point or support an argument.

Cite your sources

However you present your work you should always acknowledge where your information came from. Referencing or citing someone else’s work is important for the following reasons:

♦ It shows how much reading you did, and that you didn’t rely on a single source to form your conclusions
♦ It gives credit to the person who did the original research, and makes sure you don’t get accused of trying to pass someone’s work off as your own
♦ Lets the reader check if you are misquoting the source, or taking what they said out of context
♦ Lets the reader find out more information on the topic

Images

All photos, drawings, tables, graphs etc included in your work must have a caption just below the image and be referenced. The type of material (photograph, painting, artwork etc) should be included in the reference.

The principle for providing information when referencing is that readers can find the same information for themselves. At Kent College we use the Harvard Referencing System to give a consistent format.
Referencing

There are 2 parts to referencing:

The first part is when you add references within the main text itself. These are shortened versions of what appears in your bibliography, usually just containing the author and year of publication:

…around 10% of the medical community disagrees with this statement (Smith, 2005)...

If you mention the author’s name in the main text, you don’t need to include this in the brackets:

…Smith (2005) demonstrates that this is not the case...

If you used a book with more than one author you should mention both:

…Smith and Brown (2007) showed that this link was strong...

If you quote directly you should use the exact words in quotation marks:

…Jones (2010) states that students should debate the strengths and weaknesses of their “information-seeking habits”...

The second part is the References list or Bibliography, which goes at the end of your work. This is a complete list of all the resources you used, arranged alphabetically by the authors’ surnames. Each reference has its own line.

The References list includes all the resources you referred to in your document. A Bibliography lists all the resources you used as background reading. You should include the following information:

♦ Author or editor (surname first) - for websites without an author use the publisher
♦ Date of publication (in brackets)
♦ Title (underlined or in italics)
♦ Publisher
♦ For newspapers and journal articles include the name, volume and issue, and page numbers
♦ For websites – Available at: (URL). Accessed: date

See the next page for examples

Neil’s Toolbox

Rather than spending a lot of time learning the exact formatting, you can use a free online tool to help build your references for you - http://www.neilstoolbox.com/bibliography-creator/index.htm

Choose the type of source you are trying to reference (e.g. book, website, etc) and fill in the details. Then just highlight and copy the result into your bibliography.

TIP - you must type something in all the boxes, so you might need to type in the name of the publisher of a website if you cannot find an author, or type ‘Date Unknown’ for example.
Referencing

How to lay out the information

Books:

Chapter in a book of essays:

Newspaper and journal articles:

Websites:

Video and TV programmes:
Channel Four (1992) *Cutting edge: Neighbours* (TV programme 4 May)

Images

Where to find the information

For books, look on the title page for the author, title and publisher. The date is on the back of the title page next to the © symbol.

Journals will usually have the details on the contents page or inside the front cover.

Some websites tell you how to cite or list them. If not, you can find the information on the bottom of the page or use links for Home, About, Contact, FAQs etc. If there is no individual author use the publisher or sponsor of the website.

Online databases will usually tell you how to cite the article and this can be copied and pasted.

Your school planner includes a page called *Citing Sources and Compiling a Bibliography*. For more information see:

“Cite Them Right”, by Richard Pears and Graham Shields at 371.3 in the Library
Leeds University guide to referencing at http://tinyurl.com/d87q3hv
BETter - how can I improve?

What will I remember?
What did I do well?
What would I change if I did it again?
What did I learn that I can use again?
What parts of the process do I need help with?

Judge
♦ Have you fulfilled your objective?
♦ Could you improve on your work?

Evaluate
♦ Does your work fulfil assessment directives or marking criteria or match up to your proposal?
♦ Did you give credit to all of your sources, using the correct format?
♦ Is your work neat and well organised?
♦ Is your work complete and does it include heading information (name, date etc)?

Review, reflect and build on what you’ve learnt
♦ As you worked on this assignment, did you learn anything that you would use again?
♦ What would you do differently next time?
♦ What information sources did you find useful? Have you bookmarked them for future use?
♦ Were any information sources not accessible? Let the librarian know

Help is always available from the Librarian

Bibliography

The hand model of research is based on:

