

# Golspie High School

## Information Skills S5 & S6



Contents Page

Introduction	Page 3
Citation Styles	Page 4
Evaluating Resources	Page 5
Evaluating Websites	Page 6-7
Evaluating Books	Page 8
Evaluating Periodical Articles	Page 9-10
Plagiarism	Page 11

## Introduction

When you leave school to go to college or university you will be expected to know how to use the library effectively. The basic skills required to carry out any library research will depend heavily on your existing library skills. Libraries at further and higher education institutes are vast so you need to be aware of what you are looking for. In this short course of advanced library information skills we will look at the types of skills you will require, the resources that you will be expected to use, evaluating resources for relevance and tips on avoiding plagiarism.

Firstly, take a look at these simple hints and tips on how to start your library information search successfully.

### **Define Unfamiliar Terms**

Before you start searching information make sure that you understand your essay question fully.

### **Highlight Keywords**

When you receive an essay question or project topic identify the keywords which will give you a starting point for your research.

### **Broad and Narrow Terms**

You must be able to distinguish broad from narrow terms.

If you cannot you will have no idea how much information you are likely to find, or whether the information you are looking for is appropriate to the question you are trying to answer. Highlighting the correct keywords in the question or project specification you have been given means you will be looking for information using the right term.

However, one term will often not be enough.

### **Synonyms and Related Terms**

Consider that you may have to expand your search to cover any synonyms and related terms. By doing this you will cover all possible sources that may help with your research.

## Citation Styles

### Introduction

When writing or producing any piece of written work at school, college or university you must refer in your text to any material that you have used that has been written or produced by others. This procedure is called **citing** or **quoting references**. It is important that you try to be accurate and consistent as this will enable readers to identify and locate the material which you found helpful when producing your work. As a general rule you should follow the same set of rules every time you cite a reference.

### The Harvard Referencing System

The system for citing work which you have quoted, paraphrased or summarised is commonly known as **The Harvard Referencing System** or **Author Date Method**. This is the system that is used by most Scottish schools, colleges and universities. This is how the Harvard Referencing System looks when seen in a bibliography.

Mercer, P.A. and Smith, G., 1993. *Private Viewdata in the UK*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Longman.

### Activity 1

#### Subject Bibliography

Choose a subject that you are interested in researching and find ten books or resources that will help you carry out this research. When you have found relevant resources write them out using the **Harvard Referencing System**.

## Evaluating Resources

### Introduction

When carrying out research for Higher courses, Advanced Higher courses, College courses and University courses you will use the internet extensively. Although many of you will know how to use the internet for social and entertainment purposes you will be required to identify reliable sources of internet for research purposes.

### Activity

For this activity we will look at the following website called **The Internet Detective**.

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/index.html>

The Internet Detective tutorial is divided into the following sections:

**What's the Story?** – understand the advanced Internet skills required for university and college work.

**The Good the Bad and the Ugly** – see why information quality is an issue on the web, especially for academic research. Learn how to avoid time wasting on Internet searching, scams and hoaxes.

**Detective Work** – get hints and tips that help to critically evaluate the information you find on the Internet.

**Get On the Case** – try out your Internet Detective skills with these practical exercises.

**Keep the Right Side of the Law** – be warned about plagiarism, copyright and citation.

## Evaluating Websites

Now that you have gone through the Internet Detective tutorial you should be quite confident in evaluating websites. Below is a reminder of the set of questions that you should ask yourself when looking through web search results.

1. What's at stake? How reliable does my information have to be?
2. What can the URL's tell you, in the search results list?
  - Who published it?
  - Is it a personal page? **Look for ~ % members aol geocities users**
  - What type of organisation is behind it? Would limiting to certain types help? **site: org OR site: gov**
  - Non profit = org    univ/college = edu            gov/t = gov  
a business = com            foreign = jp, aus, cn etc.
3. What can the perimeter of the page tell me?
  - Who or what agency is the author?
  - What values do they stand for?
  - What are their credentials? What right to offer an opinion? Why believe them?
  - What is their bias? Can you see any of the following on the page, About Us, Sponsors, Philosophy, Biography, Who Am I, No Background Info.
  - Is it current/recent enough? Is the last updated date old? Are the dates in a news site too old? Dates in the URL may help with this. Is there no date?
4. Does the content appear good quality?
  - Are sources documented in footnotes or links outside work?
  - Are there links to more information? Any dead links?
  - Links to other points of view?
  - Black/violent background or other evidence of hype/trash/ranting?
5. What do others say about the page?
  - Who links to it? Who owns it?
  - Google the author's name and check their qualifications

6. Why was it put on the web? What is the purpose of the page?
- Is it to inform with facts/data
  - Share or disclose
  - Entice or sell
  - Explain or persuade
  - Dupe, rant or satire

By getting into the habit of asking yourself the above questions you will find relevant information quickly and effectively online.

### Activity 1

Take a look at the following websites, which most of you will be familiar with anyway and go through the six questions above to evaluate their reliability.

Wikipedia  
BBC  
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

You will find these websites by entering the above terms into Google

### Activity 2

Now that you have looked at different types of websites look on the internet for information on a topical issue such as **Nuclear Armageddon, Stem Cells or Abortion**. Using the checklist find an example of a reliable website and a website that does not contain official information. It might be that you are looking for a site that is published or edited by a group who oppose an issue or promote an issue.

Topic Chosen:
Reliable Website Address:
Unreliable Website Address:

## Evaluating Books

While studying at university or college you will be expected to display good knowledge on how to carry out research whilst undertaking coursework. It will not be enough to simply use the internet and you must not rely on the internet to get you through your work. You will be expected to use books, periodical articles, databases, serials and journals. In the school library you will not commonly find many of these resources. However, university libraries and college libraries will have resources highly specific to the courses offered at that institute. It is important that you evaluate the resources before selecting those which are most relevant.

When evaluating a book, check these basic points:

- **Author or contact person** – located on title page; brief biographical information may be included in introductory pages or at end of book
- **Publisher** – located on title page
- **Date of publication** – located on title page
- **Intended audience** – determined by examining the content, preface and introduction
- **Purpose of the information** – determined by examining the content, preface and introduction

Reputable publishers take many steps to ensure that their publications are of a high quality. Publishing houses have their own individual criteria that new publications have to meet before they can be made available to the public. However, there are many publishers that do not follow such criteria and often a budding author can pay these publishers to publish their books. Books such as these are very similar to unreliable websites because you cannot fully trust that the information is true and accurate.

The books that you will find in university and college libraries will have undergone another level of review by the professionals who work there. This means that all the resources housed in these libraries have another level of authority and reliability.

## Evaluating Periodical Articles

Periodical articles include newspaper articles, magazine articles or specialist journal articles. When evaluating a periodical publication, check these basic points:

- **Author or contact person** – usually located on first page of article; position and/or institutional affiliation may be included as footnote on first page or at end of article
- **Publisher** – usually located on contents page of issue
- **Date of publication** – usually located on cover and/or contents page
- **Intended audience** – determined by examining the content; publication may state intended audience in note on contents page
- **Purpose of the information** – determined by examining the content

University and College libraries generally house journals and serials that are specific to courses and those that are regarded as the leading publications in their field. These publications undergo a similar review process to books with publishers and normally specialist editors checking content and quality.

Articles that appear in journals will have undergone a very strict peer review process. This is when a professional, for example a heart surgeon, undertakes research on a specific topic connected to heart surgery and submits it to a relevant journal. The article will then be sent to the editor who themselves will be considered to be an expert in the field of heart surgery. This editor will make the decision as to whether the article is good enough to be published. This editor will be assisted by an editorial assistant who will be the expert on editing the article, house style and copyright but will not be experienced in the content of the article.

### Activity

Using the internet find journals that would be suitable for the following professions:

Bookseller	Journal name:  Publisher:
Heart Surgeon	Journal name:  Publisher:
Oil Engineer	Journal name:  Publisher

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Newspapers and magazines will have journalists who will write about certain subjects but may not be a professional of that field. For example, a sports journalist who specialises in football commentary may not have been a professional footballer or a political journalist may not have been a politician. Their knowledge generally comes from experience from watching and absorbing themselves in that subject or from previously undertaking a profession that is based in the same environment, for example, a fashion journalist may have worked for a designer or on fashion shows.

## Plagiarism

### Introduction

When you are writing an assignment or carrying out research projects you must present evidence in your work which supports your arguments. As we have previously noted the best way to present this evidence is by citing the resources that you have used throughout your work.

You will probably draw on many people's work when you carry out research and it is, therefore, important to acknowledge any work that you may have consulted. If you do not cite work you may be accused of plagiarism. This is:

*“to take someone else's words or ideas and present them as your own without proper acknowledgement.” (Marshall and Rowland, 1998)*

Plagiarism may seem like the easy option, especially if the subject you are researching is difficult to understand but colleges and universities come down heavily on anyone caught plagiarising material. It is considered academic dishonesty and the consequences can vary from failing your essay to failing your course.

There are several forms of plagiarism:

- Using published ideas as your own
- Representing excerpts or images from books, journals or papers published on the internet as your own work.
- Copying the work of another student or another person and presenting it as your own.
- Collaborating inappropriately with another student when the assignment requires you to work as an individual.
- Resubmitting substantive excerpts of your own work from other assignments as a new piece of work.

Plagiarism can occur in very small sections of work like in a sentence or it can appear in big chunks like a paragraph or a whole essay, however big or small the seriousness of the offence is still the same.

### How can you ensure that you do not commit plagiarism?

While carrying out research you will take lots of notes in class or read numerous books and it may be difficult to distinguish between what is your own thoughts and other people's thoughts. Generally, however, as a rule you should always look for evidence to back up any thought that you have. Also,

by citing any authors you will cover yourself throughout your work and presenting evidence in the correct way will also show that you have researched your topic correctly.

You can present evidence to support your points in several ways:

- Quoting directly from another source
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing
- Reproducing a diagram, image or artwork

### Tips to Avoid Plagiarism

1. Keep a notebook handy. When you come across an interesting point make a note of it. Include the author and or editor, date, page number, journal, article title, book and chapter title and publisher.
2. Don't use extensive quotes think about paraphrasing or summarizing points in your own words in support of your argument and always cite the original source.
3. Use a thesaurus as a word prompt when paraphrasing or summarizing points.
4. When downloading material from the internet make sure you make a note of the source.
5. Always make sure you cite all your sources.
6. Contact your personal tutor or study skills advisor to find out ways of making your arguments and supporting them from the published material.
7. Have confidence in yourself and develop your skills in making the argument in your own words with support from the literature.
8. Leave yourself thinking time for the assignment so that you are not tempted to take shortcuts.
9. Remember if you are tempted to inappropriately use another person's work, or your own from another assignment, without accurate citation you are risking your career.

(Taken from <http://www.hero.ac.uk> Plagiarism: HERO)