HOW TO… Develop Your Research Skills

What is research?

Research at college is usually **finding information** for an essay or assignment, or perhaps for your HN graded unit project. Research is also called data collection or information retrieval. The ability to gather and use information will be the key to your college studies, and also if you want to move on to higher education.

What information do you need?

Look at the essay question or title and decide what it is you really need to find out. The **length** of the essay will also tell you how much detail you need to include: a 500 word essay will need a lot less information than a 2,000 word essay. The length of time you have to complete the essay will also indicate how much **time** you have to complete your research; if you have only a week to complete the essay, then don't spend too long on researching – just a few hours.

Here's some guidance on what different instructions in an essay question mean:

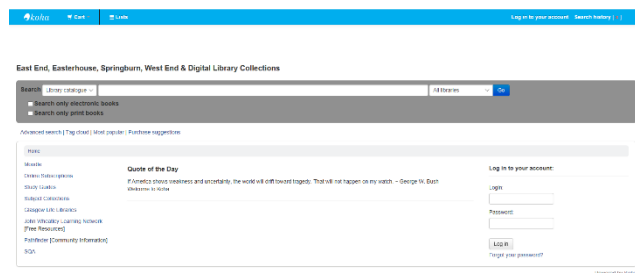| Instruction	What you are expected to do
Criticise	Judge the merit of a work, person, statement - points for and against
Describe	Give a description in words so that the reader can form an idea – include your opinion
Discuss	Write about all aspects of the question, considering all views and interpretations - points for and against
Evaluate	Balance the evidence for and against, then give your opinion based on the evidence
Illustrate	Include a diagram or an example
Outline	Include the main points only – cover what, where, when, how, why and who

How can I find the information I need?

Mind mapping is a good place to start to see what you already know about the subject, to identify gaps and help you see what you need to find out.

Through your Mind Map, list the sources of information you will be likely to use for your research, e.g. books (both reference books and textbooks), internet, journals, online resources – all are available at Glasgow Kelvin College. See the guide on mind mapping for more information.

How do I locate information?

The **Library catalogue** is a good place to start. It will tell you what's available in the Learning Centres at each of the College campuses as well as which eBooks are available electronically. You can access the catalogue online at https://kelvin-glasgow.koha-ptfs.co.uk/, or you can use the link on the Library Services page on the College intranet. A separate sheet is available in the Learning Centres to guide you through using the catalogue.

Keyword searching makes best use of the catalogue. This means looking for a particular topic, just as you do in using the Internet. The keyword may need to be refined if you find too many items, or broadened if you don't get many hits. Your Mind Map should help you list lots of keywords for searching. If you need help with alternative keywords, try using a dictionary or a thesaurus.

When you have found an item on the catalogue…

All items listed in the catalogue are arranged on the shelves by **Dewey Decimal Classification** (DDC) – that is the number on the spine of the book. It is a numerical sequence and items on the same topic are located together. The longer the number, the more specialised the text. For example, 658 is general management, 658.3 is personnel management, and 658.3124 is training and development within personnel management.

Learning Centre staff will be happy to help you with any queries about using DDC to find items.

It might sound like the right book, but…

❖ Use the **contents page** to see what the book is about. The contents page lists the chapter headings, and often gives a summary of what is contained in each chapter.

- ❖ Use the **index** to find specific keywords. The index is an alphabetical listing of the key terms used in the book and a page number indicates where the term appears in the text.
- ❖ **Skimming** - this is a method of quickly reading over a book – the title, contents, main ideas of the author (from the back cover), and so on to see if the book is suitable.
- ❖ **Scanning** – this is a method of quickly looking over a page. You scan through looking for the keyword to see where it is in the text – homing in on the keyword. You can then read the paragraph more closely to find the information you need.

See the Reading Skills guide for more information.

Evaluation

Evaluating the information you have found is very important. Remember, just because it is published doesn't mean it is true! This is especially true of information on the Internet. Always think before using information or facts. Ask yourself:

- ✓ Is the information relevant to your research topic?
- ✓ Is the information what you expected to find out? (if not, check if it is duplicated in other reliable sources)
- ✓ Is the information accurate?
- ✓ Is the information the same from different sources? (this makes it more likely to be accurate)
- ✓ Is it up to date? (although historical information may be what you are looking for)
- ✓ Is it opinions or facts?
- ✓ Is the author likely to be biased for any reason?

Remember to keep a note of the details of the books, journals, and online resources which you have used. Information used in your essays must be referenced i.e. you must acknowledge the source of information.

A Guide to Citations, Referencing and Bibliographies is available in the Learning Centres and on the College intranet.

Things to help you

- ❖ Learning Centre staff – we are happy to help, just ask!

- ❖ Thesaurus or dictionary (including specialist dictionaries) – will help you find alternative keywords and ensure you know what any technical terms mean before you start your research.

- ❖ User guides – there are a number of guides to help you:
    - o [Student Guide to Citations, Referencing and Bibliographies](#)
    - o [Guide to Research](#)
    - o [Develop Your Skills Using Mind Maps](#)
    - o [Develop Your Note-Taking Skills](#)
    - o [Develop Your Reading Skills](#)
    - o [Develop Your Time Management Skills](#)
    - o [Develop Your Writing Skills](#)
    - o [Borrowing from other Glasgow College Libraries – Reciprocal Borrowing Guide](#)
    - o [Using the Library Catalogue](#)

- ❖ Online resources available in College are an excellent source of information as only reliable databases are included. These cover a variety of subject areas such as science, music, engineering, computing, health, business, and social sciences, and provide access to newspapers and journals, images, e-books and archive materials e.g.:

    - o eBooks collections (Dawson and ebrary);
    - o Custom News and General Onefile (newspapers and journals);
    - o Digimap for Colleges;
    - o JISC Media Hub;
    - o Gale Virtual Reference Library;
    - o Anatomy TV from Primal Pictures (3D anatomy);
    - o and many more via Athens (check our [Online Resources](#) page).

All online resources can be accessed using Athens. Ask in the Centres for more information.