



KINGS NORTON
GIRLS' SCHOOL & SIXTH FORM

STUDY SKILLS LEAFLET

RESEARCH SKILLS AND WEBSITE
EVALUATION

RESEARCH SKILLS

The ability to find, use and evaluate information is integral to the success of any research assignment. All of your assignments require you to have good research skills in order to answer questions and develop your knowledge of a subject.

In school there are three different types of resources that you can utilise for your research. These are:-

- **Books** – Books are often the most reliable type of resource you can use. Because the contents of a book is very specific, it is often easier and quicker to use one to find out information.
- **Journals** – Subject specific journals are available in the Learning Hub. Articles within academic journals are written by experts and are a reliable source. However because of the high level of content the information may be written in a very academic style.
- **Websites** – There are many useful and informative websites which you can use to gather information. However, because the internet is so vast there is no guarantee of quality and it is therefore very important to evaluate it for accuracy and reliability.

A BASIC GUIDE TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

1. Understand all the requirements of your assignment and have a clear understanding of what is expected of you, eg. How many words you are expected to write, due dates, etc.
2. Make sure you understand the question then write down everything you already know about the topic. Identify subtopics or questions about your main topic. Think of keywords, synonyms and phrases that could be associated with the topic.
3. Decide which would be the best types of resources for obtaining the information required. Conduct a search by using either the library catalogue, journals or the internet.
4. Evaluate the information to assess its quality and accuracy.
5. Make a note of relevant information and quotes, as well as the details of the resource. Responsible use of information is a key skill and you must ensure that you reference other people words or ideas correctly in order to avoid plagiarism.

FINDING ONLINE RESOURCES

There are lots of different search engines you can use to search for information, such as Bing and Yahoo. The most popular is Google which has several different search engines. The three most useful ones for academic study are:-

Google – Google's main search engine which searches over a billion websites.

Google Scholar – this is the academic arm of Google. Google has deals with a number of academic publishers and Google Scholar allows users to search across their content. The results can be a mix of citation details, abstracts and entire journal articles.

Google Books - Google has worked with a number of large research libraries to scan their books and make them freely available to the world.

BASIC SEARCH TECHNIQUES

"" Quotation Marks – use quotation marks to search for an exact word or set of words. This is useful for searching quotes or song lyrics.

.. Two Full Stops – use two full stops between two numbers to express a range of things like dates, measurements and prices eg. 1840..1890

Boolean searches are carried out using terms like AND, OR and NOT. These "operators" specify what words the results of your search should or should not contain.

AND – results contain everything in which both terms appear.

OR – results contain either one term or the other.

NOT – results will contain the word you want and not another word, eg. Jaguar NOT animal.

Wildcards – replace one or more characters in the search term with *, eg. Bird* would search for birdman, birdbath etc.

EVALUATING WEBSITES

The internet is an uncontrolled environment. Anyone can create a website or post information. This means that you cannot guarantee the quality or accuracy of the information. One useful method of evaluating a website is to use the CRAAP Test, which is a list of questions which will help you evaluate the information you find

Currency: the timeliness of the information

- When was the information published or posted?
- Has the information been revised or updated?
- Is the information current or out-of date for your topic?

Relevance: the importance of the information for your needs

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?
- Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?

Authority: the source of the information

- Who is the author/publisher?
- Are the author's credentials or organisational affiliations given?
- Is the author qualified to write on the topic?
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source?
examples: .com (commercial), .edu (educational), .gov (government),
.org (nonprofit organization), or .net (network)

Accuracy: the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content.

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- Does the language or tone seem biased?
- Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

Purpose: the reason the information exists

- What is the purpose of the information? to inform? teach? sell? entertain? persuade?
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
- Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda?
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?