

LEARN INDEPENDENTLY

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LEARNING FROM DOCUMENTS = LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY

In conversation, speakers listen for new information, ask questions and evaluate each others' reliability--all as part of routine social interaction. These conversations are supplemented by other experiences, the most important being independent learning with the aid of DOCUMENTS (texts, pictures, recordings, movies, websites, etc.) Elements of independent learning include:

AWARENESS. Becoming aware of a LITERATURE, which the range of documents associated with a topic.

APPRECIATION. Acquiring an understanding of the beliefs, languages and controversies associated with a literature

ACCESS. Learning how and where to get access to documents

STUDY. Consuming a document attentively, thoroughly, thoughtfully.

DISCUSSION. Sharing, comparing and debating your impressions with others

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

RESPECT FOR COLLEAGUES. Keeping discoveries to oneself sabotages the learning process by silencing the feedback and discussion that make development of your personal point of view possible.

RESPECT FOR THE DOCUMENTS. Most of the printed documents you will use were produced in very small quantities, and are difficult to replace if damaged, or lost. A similar care must be extended toward software and hardware. Without the right attitude there's no point in trying to learn; there's no hope for you at all.

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

This guide identifies basic principles of learning how and where to find documents in a systematic way--the activity known as RESEARCH. Don't confuse research with

BROWSING. Unsystematic wandering through collections of documents is valuable for purposes of inspiration and recreation. Browsing, a casually focused kind of wandering, often suffices for nonemergency situations. But systematic research is the only sure way to master a topic quickly and securely.

FOLLOWING SOMEBODY'S ADVICE can provide a starting point, but doesn't eliminate the need for research. Even if the advice is accurate, it still is your responsibility to find your own information: one of the goals of research is to advance beyond the opinions and theories of other people.

PERFORMING AN ERRAND. You have been told to look at a project, a topic or a specific document. Strictly speaking this is not research at all, but an errand.

FOR MORE INFO

Booth, Colomb and Williams, *The Craft of Research*, Reference-Q180.55.M4B66 1995

Mann, *A Guide to Library Research Methods*, Reference-Z710.M23 1987

RESEARCH IN 6 STEPS

1. Schedule sufficient time to be thorough & take notes.
2. Use reference materials to clarify your topic, determine keywords & survey its literature.
3. Use indexes to locate specific documents.
4. Study each document for its content & its citations.
5. Evaluate the documents.
6. Update your notebook with the exact names of the documents you use and where you found them.

1. SCHEDULE SUFFICIENT TIME

Research is work and requires time; if done in a rush it yields superficial results. Allow yourself time to be careful and thorough. Be prepared! Always have writing materials with you, including one notebook that stores all your research notes.

2. CLARIFY YOUR TOPIC & SURVEY ITS LITERATURE

It is normal to begin with only a vague idea of what you are looking for! The library REFERENCE AREA contains specialized books that will help you get information to begin. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and material your instructor has recommended.

USE THE ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES and other reference materials to get a quick overview of the important documents—the literature—of your topic.

3. USE INDEXES TO LOCATE SPECIFIC DOCUMENTS

To acquire information about anything outside of ones familiar range it's necessary to take advantage of the work of others who have used documents, and examined and described them. This work is available in a special category of tools which includes bibliographies, library catalogs, periodical indexes and search engines. These indexes do not provide documents directly, but tell you what exists and where it is. With the background provided by reference material you can proceed to more advanced documents. Locate them with indexes:

USE LIBRARY CATALOGS TO FIND BOOKS. Such as the Educational Resources of SCI-Arc (EROS) library catalog. See the *Kappe Library Guide* "How To Find Books in the Library Catalog")

USE PERIODICAL INDEXES TO FIND MAGAZINE ARTICLES. Such as The Avery Index. (See the *Kappe Library Guide* "How To Find Articles in Magazines")

USE WEB GUIDES TO FIND INTERNET DOCUMENTS. Such as Google. See the *Kappe Library Guide* "How to Find Documents on the Web")

4. STUDY EACH DOCUMENT FOR ITS CONTENT & FOR ITS CITATIONS

STUDY. The documents you have located will be useful only if you study them carefully. Study means taking time to absorb the words and images and think about them--not just glance at them. If the document has an index, use it to find all the sections that relate to your task.

LOOK FOR CITATIONS. Besides its own content, each document is valuable as a link to other documents. Look for citations—references to other documents in footnotes, critical passages and lists of consulted works (bibliographies, filmographies, etc.) These provide the next set of documents you will want to study.

5. EVALUATE THE DOCUMENTS

ACCESS. Is the document easy or difficult to use?

ACCOUNTABILITY. Does the document identify the author and publisher? If a website, does it provide a link to the author?

AUTHORITY. What are the author's credentials? Is it possible to tell?

CURRENCY. When was it published (or updated)? If a website, are the links still valid?

OBJECTIVITY. Does the document contain advertising and partisanship? What is its tendency or editorial position?

6. UPDATE YOUR NOTEBOOK

If you keep a notebook--one centralized notebook--for all your research notes, you will be able save yourself from having to re-look-up things, give accurate advice to others, produce accurate and complete bibliographies for written papers and you will define a zone of sanity safe against information overload

DON'T FORGET TO ASK

When documents are missing, machines aren't working, or your searches turn up nothing, ask the staff for help.

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