

RESEARCHING CONCEPTS

KAPPE LIBRARY GUIDE no. 22

The *Kappe Library Guides* identify general resources on broad topics to help researchers begin their work. Individual projects and practitioners are avoided; guides, indexes and general introductions are preferred to specialized works.

Book citations that include a call number can be found at the Kappe Library; other books are identified by author, title and date. Magazine articles are selected from the *Avery Index* and the *Art Index* databases; to identify which are available at the Kappe Library, see the *Periodicals In the Collection* reference.

Web versions of this and all other Guides are available at <http://www.sciarc.edu/v5/aboutarch/lrg.php> and <http://sciportal.sciarc.edu> Submit questions and suggestions to the library manager directly at kevin@sciarc.edu

RESEARCH WHAT?

Students are often presented with one word riddles to research—Affect, Autonomy, Body, Connection, Space, Time, etc. What are you supposed to do? Where do you begin?

APPROACH THE TASK AS A RESEARCHER—not as a philosopher—and try to discover the main points of the major historic and current debates about the concept.

TIP: Budget extra time. Researching concepts requires more effort than researching facts. Even if you work exclusively with reference works, there will still be obstacles of idiom and culture that require study and reflection to overcome.

USE REFERENCE WORKS

Use specialized reference works to get a quick overview of the important texts—the literature—of your topic. Pay attention to which texts are mentioned most frequently. What names come up most often? Who's the authority? Who's controversial? Who's related to whom?

RECOMMENDED REFERENCE WORKS

- Critical Terms for Art History*, Reference-N34.C75 1996
- The Dictionary of Art*, Reference-N31.D5 1996 (It's really an encyclopedia)
- The Johns Hopkins Guide to Theory & Criticism*, Reference-PN-81.C97J64 1993
- McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms*, Reference-Q-123.M34 1993
- McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science & Technology*, Reference-Q-121.M3 1997
- New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Reference-ML-100.N48
- The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, PN1021.N39 1993
- The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Reference-B61.R68 1998 (Excellent place to start)

TIP: When you use encyclopedias, use their indexes. Often there will not be an article devoted to a concept, but the index will direct you to many articles in which the concept is discussed. For example, there is no article titled "Space" in the *Britannica*, but in the index under "Space" are 48 sections of 16 different articles.

USE A SURVEYS

Text books and historical surveys are not usually by the most famous authors, nor do they represent a discipline's latest developments, but they can provide the background necessary to approach such material.

RECOMMENDED SURVEYS

- Allen, *Fundamentals of Building Construction*, Reference-TH-145 .A417 2004
- Arnason, *History of modern art: painting, sculpture, architecture, photography*, Reference-N6490 .A713 1998
- Banister-Fletcher's A History of Architecture*, 19th ed., Reference-NA200.F63 1987
- Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Reference-NA-680.C87 1996
- The Dictionary of Art*, Reference-N31.D5 1996
- Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, Reference-NA500.F75 1992

Janson, *History of Art*, Reference-N5300.J3 1991
Kostoff, *A History of Architecture*, 2nd ed., Reference-NA200.K65 1995
Oliver, *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Reference-NA208.E53 1997
Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, Reference-NA4170.P48 1997
Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, Reference-NA2500 .R68 1992
Simmons, *Construction: principles, materials and methods*, Reference-TH145 .S513 2001
Stein, *Mechanical and Electrical Equipment for Buildings*, Reference-TH6010.S74 2000
Trachtenberg, *Architecture from prehistory to postmodernism*, Reference-200.T7 1985

TIP: Within each Library of Congress topic, the lower a book's call number is, the broader its scope.

TYPICAL PROBLEM: JUMPING AHEAD. Do not use a specialist work as your introduction to a topic. Derrida's discussion of the Kantian sublime will resist even the most earnest effort of reading unless you are equipped with basic background information on the concept of the sublime, Kant's use of it, and the role of Kant's discussion in subsequent aesthetic theory. Fortunately that knowledge is not hard to come by, if you make use of specialized reference works

USE DICTIONARIES

At every stage of the research process you will need to use dictionaries. When researching concepts it is especially important. A historically-organized dictionary like the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* will provide you with a chronological list of uses of a term, each attributed to a specific person and year. This will clarify how use changes over time, which uses are most common, and which uses are confined to one person.

RECOMMENDED DICTIONARIES

Glass, *The Encyclopedia of Architectural Technology*, NA-31 .G53 2002
The McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms, Reference-Q123.M34 1993
The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, Reference-PE1580.C66 1986
The Oxford English Dictionary. Reference-PE1625.O87 1989
The Penguin Dictionary Of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, 5th, Reference-NA31.F55 1998
A Web of Online Dictionaries, <http://www.yourdictionary.com/>
Words of Art: an online glossary of theory & criticism, <http://www.arts.ouc.bc.ca/fina/glossary/gloshome.html>

TYPICAL PROBLEM: NAME GAMES. In different disciplines the same word can mean different things. "Rhizome" means a horizontally-growing stem in botany, but in Gilles Deleuze's philosophical writings it means a condition of "multiplicity without unity." Don't expect a botanical text to give you any insight in Deleuze.

Often the discourses connected with disciplines have evolved into languages different from everyday language, though the individual words seem familiar.

For example the meaning of "Realism" might seem straightforward until you learn that the term is used to refer to 52 different concepts in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* index, including a 12th century European metaphysical doctrine, a 19th century art movement, a 20th century philosophy of science, etc.

USE INDEXES

Search library catalogs and periodical indexes to find books and magazine articles in which things are analyzed in terms of a shared concept. To find these conceptual studies, plug your KEYWORD into phrases like:

KEYWORD folklore
KEYWORD in architecture
KEYWORD in art
KEYWORD in literature
KEYWORD in music
KEYWORD symbolic aspects