SEVEN STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE LITERATURE SEARCH

An effective literature search can be time-consuming and complex. Using a systematic approach for preparing and documenting your research will help streamline the process.

1. ***Analyze your topic*.** **Preliminary reading is necessary**. Determine what are you trying to achieve with your search and define the scope. If too much has been written on the topic, you may need to narrow your focus. If too little information exists, you may need to broaden your scope.

2. ***Consider terminology***. Take a few minutes to brainstorm. **List all related terms, alternative spellings, synonyms and acronyms that relate to your topic**. As you begin your research jot down new terms and keep a list of the terms you have used.

3. ***Determine search limits***. Pick your limits and **be consistent**. Popular limits include: language, time period, publication type and age group.

4. ***Select your sources***. You will most likely use databases like MEDLINE, CINAHL, and OT Search to conduct your search, but don't forget **research and government publications.** Look for web sites that have **.gov and .edu domain names**. Other helpful sources include: statistics, organizations/professional bodies, reference collections, newspapers and company information.

5. ***Be critical of your references***. Are the references in your search results worth pursing? Do they meet your defined parameters? Article abstracts, if available, may help to answer these questions. Try to determine if a reference is from a reliable source. Are any obvious political or social biases being conveyed?

6. ***Record your search results*.** Recording your research will save you time and keep you sane. Always make sure to have **complete references** including: author(s), article title, publisher, dates, page numbers, volume number, issue, journal title etc. Where possible, use the capabilities of the database to create customized printouts of citations. 3 x 5 note cards can also work. As your research grows you might consider using a bibliographic management software program, such as **RefWorks,** to help manage your citations.

7. ***Know how to locate materials***.
   - First, check the **SML homepage** (http://library.jefferson.edu/find/journals.cfm). Scott Memorial Library currently offers full-text access to over 10,000 journals--from any computer with a web connection, on- or off-campus.
   - Search the **Library Catalog** (http://library.jefferson.edu/ql/catalog.cfm) to see if Scott Library owns a print copy of an item.
   - You can request an **Interlibrary Loan** if the Library does not own (or offer access to) the item (http://library.jefferson.edu/ql/illiad.cfm). A standard request takes 7-10 days there is a $5 charge for each item. (For students, the first 20 article requests in an academic year are free, excluding rush requests.). *Rush requests take 2-3 days and there is a $10 charge for each item*.

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