



University
of Exeter

Getting the most from research skills

Research plays a key role in every university subject. You may have to analyse journals in preparation for a seminar or essay; undertake practical research in a lab; collect responses to questionnaires; analyse government statistics, or dig deeper into a topic discussed in a lecture.

There are two main areas of research, depending on your subject you may find yourself doing more of one, than the other. Quantitative research focuses on numerical data that can be measured (e.g. statistics released by the UK Government), whereas qualitative research is focused on descriptive data that is observed.

Search

Researching a topic isn't just about searching – you are doing a deep dive into a subject, trying to find out as much as possible from different points of view. Before you begin, it's important to consider the context of your topic.

Evaluate

Finding reputable sources could be something you are familiar with from school/college coursework. Checking the sources you find will continue to be really important at university level. Go 'below the surface' of a source, to question whether the information is accurate and appropriate, and if the social/cultural context could influence how valid a source is. Test your source interrogation skills on our [guide to evaluating](#) sources.

Pause!

During research, it's often a good idea to stop and take in the wider picture. You could explore other content relating to the subject; if you are mainly reading journals why not watch some [TED talks](#) or listen to a podcast on the topic?



Reference

A vital part of research is referencing. You must clearly state the source of information you are using in your own work. You can find out more about referencing styles [here](#).

Explore

Over the summer it's a great idea to keep reading around your subject to keep your mind focused on your next steps.

- Current news (e.g. BBC, New York Times, The Guardian, The Economist)
- Journal Articles (e.g. JStor Open Access, British Medical Journal, Google Scholar)
- Research papers from your university (e.g. Open Research Exeter)

After reading each article, why not make a few notes on the subject? How did the author research the topic, how did they reference any sources they used? A key way you can prepare for research at university is spotting 'Fake News' – are the points in an article well substantiated?

If the area interests you, why not research further – discovering counter-arguments to the initial article can help to build your knowledge further.

TRANSITION TIPS



I would say the best way to develop independent research skills is simply to practise. Make sure when given any homework/course work in school that you are researching the topics thoroughly, using the most useful websites and staying up to date. You could even test yourself and research a topic of interest to you, finding out as much as you can from a variety of sources.

Annabelle, Marine Biology.



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