

Research Strategies (abridged) - 6

CONTENTS:

▶ Home	▶ 5 - Internet Research
▶ Preface	▶ 6 - Other Resources
▶ 1 - Taking Charge	▶ 7 - Case Studies
▶ 2 - Databases	▶ 8 - Learning to Read
▶ 3 - Information Fog	▶ 9 - Organizing Notes
▶ 4 - Periodical Maze	▶ 10 - Research Writing

[PDF of this Page](#) 

[How to Get the Paper Edition](#)

RESEARCH STRATEGIES - WILLIAM BADKE, COPYRIGHT 2008

Note that chapter order in the print edition will differ from the above. The online version will retain the former chapter divisions.

6

Other Resources You May Not Have Considered

[The material below is now is Chapter 7 of the print. It has been condensed for the online version, and several sections have been omitted].

Sometimes you get desperate. All the normal research avenues narrow down to footpaths and then disappear entirely. You're running out of time and you have nothing to show for the hours you've spent. Now there's a need for innovative action. This chapter will try to steer you in new and potentially fascinating directions. Then, this being the most loosely organized chapter in the book, we'll also look at some other helpful resources, and then try out a couple of case studies of actual research projects.

Seeing Where We've Been

Before we launch you into new sources for research data, it's probably a good idea to rehearse where we've been. Maybe you've missed some important resources. Let's make a strategies list so that you can go back over your research methods to this point and check out possibilities that may have eluded you the first time you went through.

The Strategies We've Covered (Now for the First Time in One Place):

- *Get a working knowledge of your topic*
- *Assess the research topic, narrow it, come up with an analytical research question and suggest a preliminary outline*
- *Do a search in a library catalog, using keywords and controlled vocabularies as needed*
- *Do a search for journal articles*

- *Make a judicious search of Internet resources.*

Now let's consider some options you may not have thought of:

Full Text Reference Tools

There is a growing number of reference works that are available in electronic format online or which have a CD that accompanies the print version. Each library will have its own collection of such tools, often available through your library home page or catalog.

On the World Wide Web, the availability of reference sources that use traditional production and editing procedures is pretty limited. Here's a wildly eclectic list of examples chosen at a whim for reasons I no longer recall:

- *Academic Guide to Jewish History*: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/jewishhistory/>
- *Cambridge History of English and American Literature (1907–1921)*, searchable by keyword and thesaurus: <http://www.bartleby.com/cambridge/>
- *The Canadian Encyclopedia*: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com>
- *Encyclopedia Smithsonian*: http://www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/
- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- *TechEncyclopedia* (definitions of terms in technology and computing): <http://www.techweb.com/encyclopedia/>
- *WolframMathWorld* (a mathematics encyclopedia): <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/>

ERIC

One of the great untapped resources for research is ERIC. No, this is not a linebacker on a sophomore football team. ERIC stands for Education Resources Information Center, a clearinghouse that makes available studies, reports, curriculum helps, etc. produced by educational institutions.

But don't think of it just as an educational database. Educators are concerned about virtually anything that might be related to education, from the effects of early poverty on adult job performance, to the ramifications of teen suicide. This means that a wide range of topics in the social sciences are covered, as well as quite a few areas of the humanities.

One further bit of information which sometimes confuses users—as ERIC grew, the database added a journals component to enable people to identify journal articles in education. The confusing part is that *ERIC itself does not provide the electronic full text of these journal articles. You will need to locate them yourself.* Thus you actually have two databases in one. To distinguish ERIC Documents from ERIC journals, the former were designated ED—so that each ERIC Document has a code number that looks like this: ED213562. ERIC Journals are designated EJ, as in: EJ498231. You can find both EJs and EDs in a single search, though it's possible to specify a search for only journals or only documents.

ERIC amazingly is available freely on the Internet (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>) and includes much full text content at no charge as well.

[See print edition for search features]

Don't ignore ERIC. It is a very good resource for many kinds of research. The fact that you can access its database and much of its full text on the Internet makes it all the more helpful.

Government Documents

Various governments produce vast hosts of information which can be found in libraries, can be purchased, or can be discovered free on the Internet (depending on what the information is). Publications put out by governments cover potentially every area of life. The only problem is that they are notoriously difficult to find. If you are in a library that has government documents, rely on your reference librarian to guide you through the maze.

For US government information on the World Wide Web, you can go to <http://catalog.gpo.gov/F?RN=419046522>. This site can help you find materials by agency or by topic. It even offers you guidance to locate documents in libraries. (In case the address goes out of date, the site name is "FDLP Electronic Collection." Google that phrase, and the site should come up.) For state government information, try the portal produced by the Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/stategov/stategov.html>.

If you are blessed enough to live in Canada, as I do, the Internet site you want is: <http://www.canada.gc.ca/publications/publication-eng.html>.

For other country governments, try: <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govinfo/resource/international/foreign.html>.

Certain libraries are designated as depository collections that receive print forms of government information. To locate the depository library near you in the US, go to <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/libraries.html>, and in Canada to <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Depo/table-e.html>. For other countries, Google the following: **depository libraries countryname**.

Doctoral Dissertations

It sounds so intriguing, so right—if you want the best cutting edge research on a topic, why not locate a few doctoral dissertations? But the realities can be a mixed bag.

The searching tool for dissertations is *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database*, an electronic tool available in larger libraries but very few small ones. It's fully searchable and you can easily locate citations, abstracts (summaries) and even full text of doctoral work on your topic. ProQuest offers with its databases the full text of close to a million dissertations, for those libraries that can afford to provide this feature. For libraries that can't, or for older dissertations not available in full text, you may be able to use interlibrary loan (not always successful) or buy the dissertation yourself from ProQuest. There is a PDF tutorial at <http://training.proquest.com/trc/training/en/pgdd.pdf>.

Bibliographic Managers

Bibliographic Managers enable you to collect citations in specified folders and generate bibliographies in most any format you want. Some offer the option of adding a plug-in to your word processing program so that you can create automatic citations and bibliographies without having to type in the information yourself. Let's take a quick look at each of them:

EndNote [See print edition]

RefWorks [See print edition]

Zotero (<http://www.zotero.org/>) [See print edition]

Consulting with Friends, Mentors and Librarians

We live in a highly consultative age, and the tendency to run our ideas past other people is pretty strong. There are real and obvious reasons why trying out aspects of your project on others can bring fresh perspectives and help you make early or mid-course correctives.

What are Friends Good For?

Meetings of minds among friends is usually helpful, at least in theory.

Consulting Professors

If you are going to consult with a professor, have a clear question in mind and focus on being brief and to the point. Professors should be consulted if you are unsure of what to do or what is being demanded, if you have thought of an approach to an assignment which may not be exactly what the professor is asking for, or if you are stuck somewhere in the research process and need advice to help you get unstuck.

Encountering Librarians

Research shows that many students have a very limited perspective on what librarians can do for them. Actually, most librarians know more about information technology than either you or your professors do. If you need to use almost any database, a librarian is likely to offer more help than anyone else can. And if you are working on a highly specialized topic, a librarian has the skills to work with that topic and actually help you advance beyond where you are. Librarians

are amazing people. Consult them frequently. They don't usually bite.



[For a study guide to this chapter along with practice exercises and assignment, **see the print edition** of this book]

TOP OF PAGE

ON TO CHAPTER SEVEN

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