Online Researching

Who Is This For?

This session is aimed at developing academic skills and improving knowledge of the key skills needed to conduct online researching at University. Participants will be able to apply this advice and information directly to any essays/assignments/research projects they will be given during their time at University.

What Are We Going to Cover?

1. Starting a Research Project
2. How (And Where!) To Find Information
3. Reliability & Source Evaluation
4. Staying Savvy and Keeping Safe
5. Managing Your Information

Aims and Objectives

Aim of session:

- To gain the skills needed in order to **effectively research online**.

By the end of the session, you will have:

- Thought about **potential starting points** for online research.
- Identified potential questions you could use to **test the reliability** of online resources.
- Had the opportunity to **conduct your own online research** (this will be done in the activity task sheet).
What Are We Going to Cover?

There are lots of things to think about when starting online research, as search engines don’t always return the exact information a person might be looking for.

There are four steps to practising good online research:

1. **Searching Online**
2. **Investigate for Information**
3. **Challenge and Question Everything**
4. **Management of Resources**

**Searching Online**

Remember to ask yourself these questions throughout your research. Especially at the start of your online researching:

- What is already known about the topic?
- Are there any current issues?
- Is there enough depth of research available on the topic?
- Does your research have a clear aim: have you developed aims and objectives?
Getting started

Tips for Using Sources from the Internet

- Always question what you are looking at.
- Beware ‘Fake News’.
- Consider the reliability of your source.
- Consider the audience the source was made for: entertainment, edutainment, academic.
- Is your source reputable?
What is the website’s domain?

- **Edu**: associated with higher education
- **Com**: commercial site
- **Org**: non-profit organisation
- **Gov**: government website

Reflect on the following when researching online:

- Does the page **function** well?
- Is the website **current**? Has it been updated recently?
- Is it **primary or secondary** information?
- Is it **understandable**?
- Is it **relevant** to your work?

Other sources for initial research:

- University Library Special Collections
- Newspaper articles
- Archival records
- Photographs
- Public Museum and Library Archives (anyone can access these with permission!)
- Private Museum and Library Archives (not available to everyone but always worth asking for access)
Activity One

Turn to the activity sheet and have a look at activity one. Think about your own research or any topics you might be interested in researching and fill in the chart provided.

Search Engines

We’ve highlighted how to dig for information, it’s time to move on to step two: hunting for information.

What is a Search Engine?

A search engine is ‘a program that searches for and identifies items in a database that correspond to keywords or characters specified by the user’.

It is a programme, not an answer machine, so they do not know what you are looking for, they simply act upon what you’ve typed in.

You will be familiar with some of the main search engines to use such as Google and Bing.

However, there are many other search websites including:

- **WolframAlpha** ([http://www.wolframalpha.com](http://www.wolframalpha.com)) which consults a database of externally curated data. It does not give you search results for other webpages but displays the information it has gathered. It can be used for researching scientific and mathematical equations.


Tips for Searching

Investigating for Research

There are ways you can improve your online search that will allow you to investigate **deeper** into the topic; find further information and **tailor your search to avoid deviating**.

It’s important you are aware of the **current issues on your topic** and previous research, that way, you can dig deeper into your search. However, in order to do that, you will need to consider the **main key concepts and key words of your question**.

We have already discussed keywords and concepts; we are now going to apply them to the topic of ‘**the media representation of female football**’.
To **tailor** your search and find other sources of information it’s important to think about **different ways** that the key words can be expressed. A good way to do this is to think about **alternative meanings and words** e.g. American spellings, and synonyms.

**Boolean Searching**

Another way to improve our search is to use what is known as Boolean logic. This sounds a little bit complicated, but you’re probably already doing it without even knowing that you are! The concept of the Boolean search is used across all search engines and basically it is when we use ‘**OR**’, ‘**AND**’, or ‘**NOT**’ to define our search to the search engine.

- **AND** - narrows the focus of your search and is used for concepts only. Google and other online search engines typically do this without you needed to input ‘and’ physically, however you might need to do it in certain databases to include only results which refer to both ‘football’ and ‘soccer’.

### Keywords:

- Female
- Football
- Media
- Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Football</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms</td>
<td>Women; Girl; Lady</td>
<td>Beautiful Game; Pigskin Sport</td>
<td>Television; Communications</td>
<td>Equal Opportunities; Portrayal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative spellings/abbreviations</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>EO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**The Media Representation of Women’s Football**

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[UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS Logo]
• **OR** - broadens the search and is used for keywords only. For the most part, it is used to encompass the idea of ‘how else would you say’, so if we were searching for the title ‘the media representation of female football’ and wish the search to include results for both ‘football’ or ‘soccer’ - we would use ‘OR’.

• **NOT** - is a little bit trickier, as it excludes certain results. So, for example, if we wanted to stop our search results from referring to ‘soccer’ we would use ‘NOT’ to give results which only use ‘football’ within them. My favourite example of the NOT search being most useful was for a student who wanted to research the Orange mobile phone network but kept getting results about the colour or the fruit. She was able to utilise this to make sure her results were relevant to her research by searching ‘Orange NOT fruit NOT colour’.

Boolean searches are most useful in longer search queries - for example ‘**media OR TV OR publicity AND female OR women AND football NOT soccer**’. These are just three examples of Boolean logic, if you wish to take this further there are many websites explaining different logic rules.
Journals

Journals are academic publications which feature a series of essays relating to their wider themes. Their articles are peer-reviewed, (which means that they have been recognised by other academics as high-quality research) and often have a list of references at the end; this can be useful for discovering other relevant sources.

Well-known journals include:

- Google Scholar
- The Directory of Open Access Journals
- Springer Open (Science)
- Oxford Journals from Oxford University Press
- JSTOR
- Google Books

Not all journals are free, but most will have some free content. Most will cover content from a wide range of subjects however, some are more subject specific: Artstor (the Arts), Springer Open (Science).
Top Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Details</th>
<th>• Check who published the journal. Where and when, this will help tell you if it's reliable.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>• The abstract is a summary of the article. It will help you decide if its actually worth reading or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skimming / Scanning</td>
<td>• Scan the article first to get an overview, then skim it for detailed information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
<td>• Useful for summaries of academic text you might be struggling with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>• Can signpost you to further literature relevant to your research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity Two

Turn to your activity worksheet and think about why and how you might challenge and question an online resource. Fill in the chart on your worksheet and then see below for suggested answers.

Challenge and Question Everything

It is important that you challenge and question the things you read and see; ‘paper refuses no ink’.

Always ask:

- Who has published the information? Would they have had a reason to publish this information? Political Agenda, Financial Agenda, etc
- Who is the author? What do they know about the subject?
- How reliable is the information? Is it from a trustworthy source? Is it a biased perspective? Is it up to date? Has it been revised?
- What were the author’s intentions? Is there a sponsor or company involved? Is the publisher well known?
- And how does the information relate to your work? Is the content useful? Is it understandable?
- What does the webpage you are viewing the information on look like? Lots of Ads? Easy to read? Do they cite their sources?

Management

It is important to consider your own online profile when researching online; what you share and put online is available for the public to view. It is important to be aware of how you present yourself online and take responsibility for your actions.
Management also means keeping track of the online resources that you find. Treat online research the same as note taking and keep a clear record of your work and most importantly when you accessed the resources you are using.

Activity Three

The next activity will require you do so some online researching of your own.

You have been asked to find online sources related to the question ‘In 2014, England won the Women’s Rugby World Cup, how has this and current campaigns challenged the boundaries of women’s sport?’.

Work your way through all four steps of the online researching process. Please allow approximately 30 minutes to complete this task.

Summary

In this session we have discussed the four essential steps to better online researching and how to become savvy online. We’ve looked at

- **Search**: starting your research, thinking about your research questions, key words, and best places to find information relating to the main themes and topics.

- **Investigate**: improving your search method using advanced search settings, synonyms, Boolean searches and journals.

- **Challenge**: thinking about where / who the information in coming from and the issues there might be with this.

- **Management**: staying safe online and following note taking and research ethics best practices.
Further Resources

If you would like to read further on ‘Online Researching’ please find some useful links below:

1. University of Leeds Skills @ Library
   https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1401/academic_skills/81/digital_skills

2. Future Learn Online Researching
   https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/searching-and-researching

3. Directory of Open Access Journals
   https://doaj.org/