

Starting the Research Process

In this book, we give you the key tools and strategies you need to successfully conduct academic literary research at the undergraduate level. Some of what you learn here will also be useful when you conduct research in other **academic disciplines**, but some is specific to literary research. Different disciplines—literature, history, biology, political science—have different expectations for their publications and research practices and different ways to measure the quality of their scholarship. If you are already familiar with conducting academic research in another discipline, therefore, you will find some things in this book that do not match what you know. But our advice will help you understand the expectations of your research assignments in literature courses. Although not everything in this book applies to every course you will take in college, there is considerable overlap among disciplines, so it will give you a good start. It will tell you what to look for and what questions to ask when you are faced with a research question or assignment in any field.

What happens before you begin what most people think of as research is in fact an important phase of the research process itself. The steps you take before you start plugging **keywords** into *Google* or into a library **database** can set you up either for success or frustration. It is our hope that this chapter will give you the tools and guidance you need to set yourself up for success. The first step is to make sure you understand what you are meant to do. Courses, professors, and assignments differ, but we are providing you with basic guidelines to help you understand your literary research assignment. We take you through the process of exploring a topic through preliminary research, then discuss the importance of keywords and the development of a search strategy.

Once you have a strategy, you are ready to begin searching for works that support, challenge, or enhance the interpretation or argument of your paper.

Even though that sounds like a straightforward and linear process, in practice good research is fairly messy, and it is **iterative**, which means that you will likely find yourself returning to some of the steps that you already took and that you will have increasingly detailed and complex questions to answer. This is a good thing: it is what is supposed to happen when one does research. For instance, you gather keywords as you go and may find that you should redo your initial searches with different keywords. Or there may be another aspect of the topic that interests you now, prompting you to change your thesis statement. Or you may find that the resources you identified in your search strategy are not fruitful, so you need to shift your focus to other resources.

Shifts in direction and going back to square one are perfectly normal and to be expected. You are not doing anything wrong. A good researcher is open to new information and to making changes, is flexible, and can adapt to meet an unforeseen challenge. This does not mean that you will never find yourself at a dead end, so we also address what to do if you get stuck. At the end of this chapter we describe five common research-related pitfalls and how to avoid them. Now let's get started—that research paper is due soon.

Understanding Your Research Paper Assignment

Literary research assignments vary widely, but there are some guiding questions that will help you understand what you are supposed to do. When in doubt as to the answer to any of these questions, check with your professor.

What Type of Assignment Is This?

If it is a research paper, you will be expected to use outside sources, not just your own ideas. There are various types of essay prompts and questions you may be asked to consider in your literature classes, but if you

are being asked to write a research paper, you likely will be expected to **analyze** a work of literature and come up with an interpretation, judgment, or conclusion (Barnet and Cain 56; Durant and Fabb 10). Your interpretation must be supported with evidence from the text itself and from the outside sources you choose to use. You may or may not be asked to be **persuasive** in your essay—that is, to take a position on a certain topic or issue related to the work you are studying and get your reader to accept your interpretation, judgment, or conclusion. If you are asked to write a persuasive essay, the topic you choose should be **debatable**. If your topic is an obvious point that no one would debate, then there will be no need for argument in your paper.

What Types of Information Must I Use?

Be sure to note if there are specific sources you must use—class readings, for instance. Most undergraduate literature research assignments focus on analyzing or interpreting one or more **primary sources**. Primary sources in literature fall into two categories. The first is the creative work itself—the novels, poems, plays, and other kinds of artistic expression that you study and discuss in class. Examples are original creative works, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen; fiction that is derived from the original, such as *Death Comes to Pemberley*, by P. D. James, which is based on *Pride and Prejudice*; and adaptations of the original for the stage or screen, such as the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Andrew Davies. The second category of primary sources is a work written or published in a time **contemporary** to the author's—for example, the author's diary or letters. Using primary sources in literary research is discussed more fully in chapter 6 of this book.

Your research assignment will likely ask you to use **secondary sources** to support your claims about the primary source at hand, regardless of whether those claims are made to inform, interpret, or convince. A secondary source is *about* the primary source: it discusses, analyzes, critiques, interprets, debates, or otherwise engages with it or with the materials contemporary to it. Examples of secondary sources are encyclopedia entries, blog posts, articles, and books. Most secondary sources that will be relevant to your literature courses are those that engage in **literary criticism**. That is, they are analyzing

or interpreting a piece of literature, through close reading of the primary source and often with the support of other secondary sources, with the goal of illuminating, explaining, or recontextualizing some aspect of it.

When you review your assignment, look carefully at the requirements for the secondary sources you should use. Are there specific sources that you are not allowed to consult? Many freely available Internet sources, such as blogs, personal Web sites, and online encyclopedias like *Wikipedia*, as well as many materials you may find at the library, such as print encyclopedias or book reviews, are generally off-limits, because they do not engage in scholarly literary criticism. But there may be some research assignments in which you are allowed to use these more general, popular materials. It all depends on your professor and on your assignment and its requirements, which is why it is important that you understand what is being asked of you.

The secondary sources that you will use are most often **peer-reviewed**. Various called *academic sources*, *scholarly sources*, *peer-reviewed sources*, *refereed sources*, *the literature*, and *scholarly literature*, these can be either books or articles, but it is important to understand that they are a specific kind of source and serve a specific purpose. They are not simply anything that is credible or that was written by an expert. A scholar could write a blog post or an article for a magazine that is a credible secondary source and meets the definition of *literary criticism*, but it is not a peer-reviewed source if it has not gone through the process of peer review before being published. In peer review, an article, book, or book chapter is examined by a group of other experts in the same academic field. They evaluate its quality and the contribution that it makes to their field and say whether or not they think it should be published in the **scholarly journal or book**. What these scholars are looking for when making this determination is specific to their field; what makes a work publishable in literary criticism will differ from what makes it publishable in sociology, philosophy, or physics. The peer review process is how scholars attempt to ensure that all the research and writing coming out of their field is of high quality and contributes to the body of human knowledge in that field, which is the goal of any **academic discipline**. This process is not infallible—it is still governed by human beings, after all—but it is rigorous.

Peer review serves the purpose of reporting on the research, interpretations, and theories of scholars in academia. It is a way for scholars to hold a conversation with one another about what they have discovered in their areas of expertise. Peer-reviewed works therefore often have a narrow focus. For example, published literature on the topic of *Jane Eyre* and marriage includes titles such as

“Metaphors and Marriage Plots: *Jane Eyre*, *The Egoist*, and Metaphoric Dialogue in the Victorian Novel,” by Erik Gray

“Re-reading *Jane Eyre*: Not a Romantic Marriage Plot but a Tale of Evolving Feminist Consciousness,” by Katie R. Peel

“Marriage in *Jane Eyre*: From Contract to Conversation,” by James Phillips

Women’s Search for Independence in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, by Claudia Durst Johnson

Books and articles like these are not the place to go if you want an overview of an author’s work or the definition of a literary term or the pros and cons of a basic argument. These general topics are more likely to be covered in **reference sources** like those discussed in chapter 7. Your literature professor will want you to use peer-reviewed works to support the claims you make in your research papers not because they are the only good sources of information but because in college you must learn how to participate in the scholarly conversation, and that conversation is taking place in peer-reviewed books and articles.

In some academic disciplines, such as those in the natural sciences, most scholars publish their research in articles; in the humanities, books are more commonly published. Undergraduate researchers understandably gravitate toward articles, because who has time to read five books for a five-page paper? We encourage you not to discount books in your research, however: doing so will cause you to miss out on a lot of content relevant to your topic. Books are often easier to read than scholarly articles, partly because they tend to be directed to an audience beyond academics, partly because the author has more space in a book than in an essay to convey information and make points.

You do not need to read a book from cover to cover for your research assignment. Instead, read strategically. Look at the table of contents: the

chapter titles will give you a sense of what the book is about. If only one chapter deals with your topic, read that chapter and not the rest. If the book has an **index**, this can enable you to home in on where your topic is discussed. If the book has no table of contents or index, read the introduction, where the author gives an overview of the book’s contents.

How do you know that a book has been peer-reviewed? Some, even those written by scholars, have not been. If the publisher is a university press, the chances are good that the book is scholarly and peer-reviewed. But take a moment to investigate the publisher, look on the “About” page of its Web site for a mission statement or statement of **scope** (i.e., what types of things it publishes), and look for what its peer review policy is. If you are unable to find this information, ask a librarian for help. In general, if you are unsure about the acceptability of a source, ask your professor. We discuss in detail the evaluation of information sources—both those you find on the Internet and those you find using library tools—in chapter 4.

Are There Any Other Requirements I Should Know About?

Does your assignment say that there is a certain number of secondary sources you must cite in your paper? If you are limited in the number and want to ensure that you are picking the best sources, you will need to review and evaluate more than that number during your research.

There are other assignment requirements that you should be on the lookout for at the beginning. For example, will your professor assign points for the length of the paper, or for its tone, **citation style**, and **bibliography** (i.e., the sources you used)? Chapter 8 discusses citation styles and the tools you can use to manage your research.

Developing a Topic

There is a lot of good advice from other people—like the authors given in the works-cited list at the end of this chapter—about choosing and developing a topic for a research paper assignment. Much of this advice focuses on picking what interests you, what you are curious about, or what provokes a response in you, and on taking care that your topic is

narrow enough so as not to overwhelm you (Durant and Fabb 17; Barnet and Cain 64).

The manageability of a topic involves not only its scope but also the resources available to you. Does your college library have books on the subject, or will you need access to an archive or some other special material that would mean a trip to another library? Your librarian can help you answer that question. Conducting a search in your library **discovery system** or **catalog**, discussed in chapter 2, or in the subject-specific databases available through your library, discussed in chapter 3, will give you a sense of what has been written about the primary work you are studying or the topic you are considering. You want a topic about which there has been enough published so that you can support your interpretation with outside sources. If entire books have been written about your topic, it may be too broad. The articles and book chapters that come up in your searches will give you an idea of the level of specificity you should aim for.

Background reading is also a good way to explore a potential topic. It can confirm whether or not the topic you are considering interests you. It can also show you if your topic is too broad and give you ideas for how to narrow it down. Reference materials, which are more general than peer-reviewed books and articles and contain entries that are usually short (e.g., encyclopedias, handbooks, and biographical dictionaries), provide easily digestible information quickly. They are discussed in chapter 7.

Another way to decide what to write about is to just go ahead and do some writing—in the form of brainstorming, freewriting, or journaling. These types of prewriting exercises, especially when paired with reading from your preliminary research, can help get your ideas flowing (Barnet and Cain 23–31). If you continue to be unsure about your topic—what it should include, how general or specific it should be—always ask your professor.

Keep in mind that this part of the research process is exploratory and low-stakes. You may decide after doing this preliminary searching, reading, and writing that your topic does not interest you after all—much better to realize that now, when you are still in the early stages of your work and have time to choose another topic! If you decide to stick with your topic, you are already on your way. If you read an encyclopedia

entry or an article that interests you and is on-topic, check the end for a bibliography or a list of further readings. These are treasure troves for your research: lists of sources laid out for you that are related to your topic and were hand-picked by an expert. Stay flexible and open to how your topic may change, expand, or narrow depending on what your research turns up—during this and later phases of the process.

Developing a Search Strategy

Once you have a topic, take a little time to develop a search strategy before going further. This is a step that is easy to skip, because the next steps seem intuitive. But what happens if you cannot find what you are looking for where you thought you would find it? Or if you search for your topic and get no usable results? Or if you search for your topic and find a set of results that is much too large for you to review thoroughly? This is where having a search strategy comes in. A strategy makes your searching more focused and efficient, and it provides you with alternative plans when things do not go as you expect.

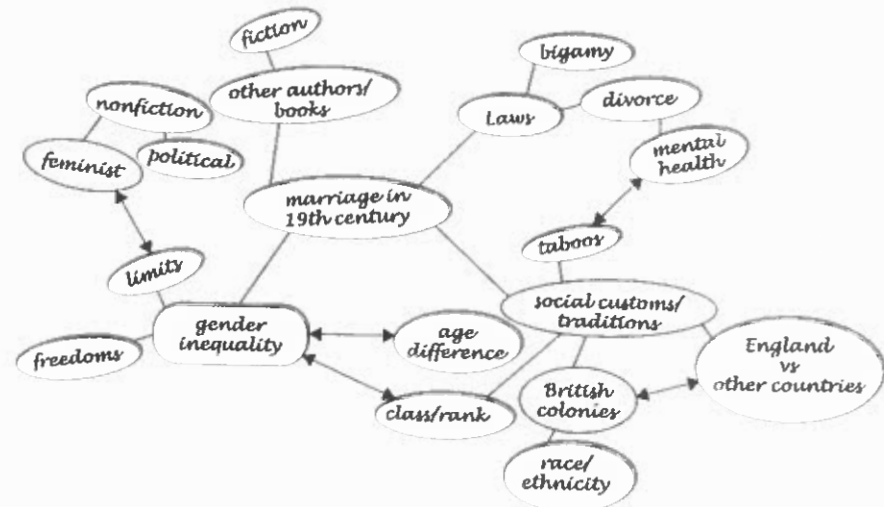


Fig. 1. Brainstorm mind map

First, think about what you want to learn about your topic. What questions would you have about it if you were the reader of your paper? What would you expect the author to cover? Make a list of subtopics that intrigue you; use a mind map or any other brainstorming technique (fig. 1). You will probably come up with more questions than you can cover in your paper, but that is a good thing. Remember, your research is part of the learning process. When you consider all the possible angles from which you could approach your topic and do research into a few of them, you should land on one or two that particularly interest you, and those should be the focus of your paper.

Possible research questions about marriage in *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë

- What were the laws surrounding marriage at the time *Jane Eyre* was written?
- How would bigamy (or attempted bigamy) have been dealt with legally then? Would Rochester have faced any consequences?
- What were the divorce laws? Was Rochester's portrayal of the difficulty of leaving Bertha, regardless of the state of her mental health, accurate for the time?
- What were the social customs or traditions?
- How would class, rank, wealth, and status have influenced what Rochester and Jane, from different socioeconomic classes, did?
- Were the customs and beliefs around marriage different in the country versus the city? in England versus Europe? in England versus the United States?
- What would the status and customs of someone living in the British colonies have been? What prejudices regarding race and ethnicity would have been involved?
- Was age difference an issue, or was it the norm? Were there any taboos when it came to age in marriage (either young or old)?
- How does the dialogue in the book about marriage either reinforce or diverge from these customs and traditions?
- How were other authors at the time portraying marriage?
- Was there any nonfiction writing about marriage then? If so, from what perspective? Was it political? feminist?
- How were the genders treated differently, and how did this difference affect the general view of marriage?

What inequalities did women face in marriage? How were women limited in their behavior and life choices? How were men limited? What freedoms were granted to men and not women, and vice versa?

Did Jane's character and relationship with Rochester mirror what was common at the time? Or was it bucking the trend, making a feminist statement?

Next, think about where you might find the answers to your questions. What types of information and documents, in print or online, might serve the purpose? Consider the following types of sources and their uses.

Types of Sources

Reference sources (e.g., encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, indexes, bibliographies)

WHAT: Usually provides an introductory overview to a topic, literary figure, or work. Often also includes a list of sources for further reading and research.

USE: These sources will get you started. They will give you background, context, and ideas for how to move forward in your research.

Popular sources (e.g., Web sites, blogs, social media, current newspapers, current magazines)

WHAT: Current news on a topic, opinions of a topic, figure, or work from pop culture or the media.

USE: These sources could be helpful if your topic is exploring the impact on pop culture of a certain work, or the portrayal of a certain work or figure in the media. Before you use them though, make sure your professor allows them.

Academic sources (e.g., peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books)

WHAT: Analysis, interpretation, and arguments made by experts in the field of literature about various topics, works, and literary figures.

USE: These are often the sources that your professors want you to use to support or challenge the points you are making in your analysis, interpretation, or argument. They will tell you what scholars in

the field of literature have studied and theorized on when it comes to the work at hand.

Primary sources

WHAT: Primary sources (e.g., the work of literature itself, newspapers, magazines, and book reviews from the time the work was first published)

USE: In addition to textual evidence from the work at hand to support your claims and interpretation, you can use primary sources to give your argument or analysis valuable historical context.

What type of publication or Web site would have the information or document you're looking for? Ask yourself if there are different perspectives on any of these questions or subtopics that you should explore (fig. 2).

For the question about marriage law when *Jane Eyre* was written, consult historical legal codes, academic research, historical newspaper articles about trials and arrests, books about the history of the legal system in England, encyclopedias, and other reference sources (e.g., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*).

For the question about social customs or traditions of the time, consult history books, academic research, newspaper and magazine articles (e.g., magazines for ladies), etiquette manuals, encyclopedias, and other reference sources (e.g., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, *Daily Life in Victorian England*).

For the question about how other authors at the time portrayed marriage, consult academic research, nineteenth-century fiction, history books, encyclopedias, and other reference sources (e.g., *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature*, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*).

For the question about how the genders were treated differently and how that difference affected the general view of marriage, consult history books, academic research, etiquette manuals, encyclopedias, and other reference sources (e.g., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, *Daily Life in Victorian England*).

Using Keywords

Now that you have an idea of what you are looking for and what types of sources to use, how will you search for those sources? Your next step



Fig. 2. Brainstorm mind map with source types

is to come up with a list of keywords. You probably have some keywords in mind immediately—the title of the book, the name of the author, and your topic, marriage. But the type of information you want should influence the words you use to look for it. If you are searching for scholarly literary criticism, it will be in texts that are written by and for an academic audience, so your searching will be more successful if you use the language of that field.

Brainstorm a little with this language need in mind—think of the words you have read in academic articles or have heard your professor use (fig. 3). For example, we usually don't use the word *matrimony* when we talk about marriage, but that synonym appears commonly in academic texts. Scholarly essays about marriage in *Jane Eyre* are often tagged in databases with the phrase *women's studies*, which is the academic discipline that studies gender issues. Even if you come up with only a few words at first, thinking intentionally about academic vocabulary will put you in the right mind-set. As your research progresses and you find scholarly sources that fit your topic, take note of the words they use—or the tags and subject headings, if you are working with a library

database of the kind discussed in chapters 2 and 3—and add them to your keyword list.

Keep in mind that this starting point with your general topic may not be where you end up. Unless you are writing a senior thesis, you should not try to answer all the questions you brainstorm in step 1 of developing your research strategy. Go through the three-step process illustrated above several times as you decide which questions you are most interested in pursuing, and your questions will become more specific and complex. You will add questions, sources, and keywords as you narrow and deepen your research. Again, if you need help anywhere along the way, ask one of your librarians. Getting help at this early stage will save you time and stress when the deadline approaches.

Good research has its logic but is also an art. The strategy laid out here will serve you well in many situations, but there are always situations for which another strategy will be more successful. As you become more experienced with research and adept at developing and following a research strategy, you will learn how to customize this process to work for you.

<i>marriage in nineteenth century</i>	<i>gender issues</i>
<i>matrimony</i>	<i>women</i>
<i>marital</i>	<i>woman</i>
<i>wedding</i>	<i>male/female</i>
<i>bigamy</i>	<i>sex roles</i>
<i>divorce</i>	<i>sexism</i>
<i>laws</i>	<i>prejudice</i>
<i>legal/illegal</i>	<i>feminism</i>
<i>social customs</i>	<i>feminist</i>
<i>culture</i>	<i>women's studies</i>
<i>traditions</i>	<i>women's rights</i>
<i>beliefs</i>	<i>feminine</i>
<i>taboos</i>	<i>femininity</i>
<i>religion</i>	<i>inequality</i>
<i>Victorian</i>	<i>discrimination</i>
<i>heterosexual</i>	<i>justice</i>

Fig. 3. Keyword brainstorm example

Searching the Internet

Today many people think that doing research means searching the Internet. Search engines, such as *Google*, *Bing*, and *Yahoo!*, are familiar to most people with access to the Internet. These tools have continually improved and are now easy to use, intuitive, and capable of presenting you with a very large set of results for almost any kind of search. Using the Internet for academic research, however, can be more complicated than it might initially seem.

As locating information has become easier, evaluating information has become more difficult. Remember that in academic research it is important not only to use information sources that are credible and trustworthy but also, most of the time, to use a specific type of source: scholarly and peer-reviewed. An enormous number of search results—often millions or tens of millions—can be overwhelming, a little like trying to drink through a fire hose. And most of what is contained in those millions of Web sites is either not relevant, not credible, or not scholarly, so using only the Internet will not give you a good idea of the sources that are available and appropriate to your topic. Another problem is that the filtering and sorting processes inevitably at play when you search the Internet are largely invisible and beyond your control. The **search algorithms** used by search engines like *Google* take into account factors such as your location, your preferences, your other activity on the Internet, and the overall popularity of Web sites, which can be influenced in various ways. These algorithms often exhibit bias based on factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity (Noble).

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, there are library tools and databases available to you as an undergraduate student that are more precise

Searching: Academic Search Premier Choose Databases

"women's rights" Select a Field (optional) ▾

AND ▾ "united states" Select a Field (optional) ▾

AND ▾ Reproducti* Select a Field (optional) ▾

+ Search

Basic Search Advanced Search Search History ▸

Fig. 25. Using truncation

Searching: Academic Search Premier Choose Databases

"women's rights" Select a Field (optional) ▾

AND ▾ "united states" SU Subject Terms ▾

AND ▾ Reproducti* Select a Field (optional) ▾

+ Search

Basic Search Advanced Search Search History ▸

Fig. 26. Using "SU Subject Terms"

topics. The most recent (published in the last two to five years) articles will not be available in *JSTOR*, because its primary purpose is to serve as an archive. For instance, the journal *Comparative Literature* is available from volume 1 (1949) through volume 63 (2011). In *Project MUSE*, a full-text resource of scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences, book collections were added in 2012, so you can search both content from peer-reviewed journals and academic book publishers at the same time. Current issues of journals are available, but often the older issues are not. For instance, the journal *Comparative Literature Studies* is available only from volume 36 (1999) to the present. *JSTOR* and *Project MUSE* tend to be offered in larger research libraries, so check with your library to see if you have access to them.

and effective than Internet search engines when it comes to finding the scholarly, peer-reviewed sources you are generally expected to use in a college paper assignment; that give you more control over your search; and that offer content that is not available for free on the Internet. This does not mean, however, that information found on the Internet is inherently bad or unreliable or that you should never use a Web site as a source for your academic assignment. Whether or not it is appropriate for you to use nonscholarly content found on the Internet depends on the assignment and its requirements. If it is appropriate, you must still make sure to evaluate critically any information you find before using it. In this chapter, we discuss tools, strategies, and tips for making Internet research more precise and efficient and how to evaluate information no matter where it comes from.

Finding Scholarship on the Internet

The authors of this book do not intend to endorse one search engine over another, but the fact of the matter is that *Google Scholar* is the only search engine that has a robust interface for searching for scholarly articles. To search in *Google Scholar*, enter your keywords into the search field as you would for any Internet search. Since you are searching scholarly material, however, keep in mind the methods and strategies for keyword searching discussed in chapters 1 and 2. For example, use keywords that scholars are likely to use when discussing your topic. Use quotation marks and asterisks and connect your keywords with Boolean operators, and there will be less irrelevant content for you to wade through. Suppose you're doing research for an assignment on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper" and your topic is about the symbolism in it. If you search for *the yellow wallpaper symbolism* in *Google Scholar*, you'll receive over nine thousand results; if you search for "the yellow wallpaper" AND symbolism, you'll receive about 2,600, still a large set but more relevant to your topic because you've ensured they all include "the yellow wallpaper" as a phrase.

The results screen in *Google Scholar* looks slightly different from that for a standard *Google* search. Your results will still be in the middle of

the page with those identifiable blue links and short descriptions underneath, but you will be given additional information. Notice the text in green directly underneath the link to the article: as in a library database, it includes the author's name, the name of the journal that published the article, the year it was published, and sometimes the name of the database where it can be found. Sometimes you can click to a PDF document of the article, though it is often stripped of identifying information. With the information about author and publication provided in the search results, you can verify the credentials of the article, review the journal to make sure that it is peer-reviewed and deals with the field you are researching, and create the citation for your works-cited list. Underneath the short blurb about the article, there is a row of links to other useful tools (fig. 27).

When you have your first set of results, *Google Scholar* presents you with options to narrow your results further. These limiters are on the left-hand side of the page. You can choose the type of document (under "Articles" or "Case Law") and the time range of publication. You can sort

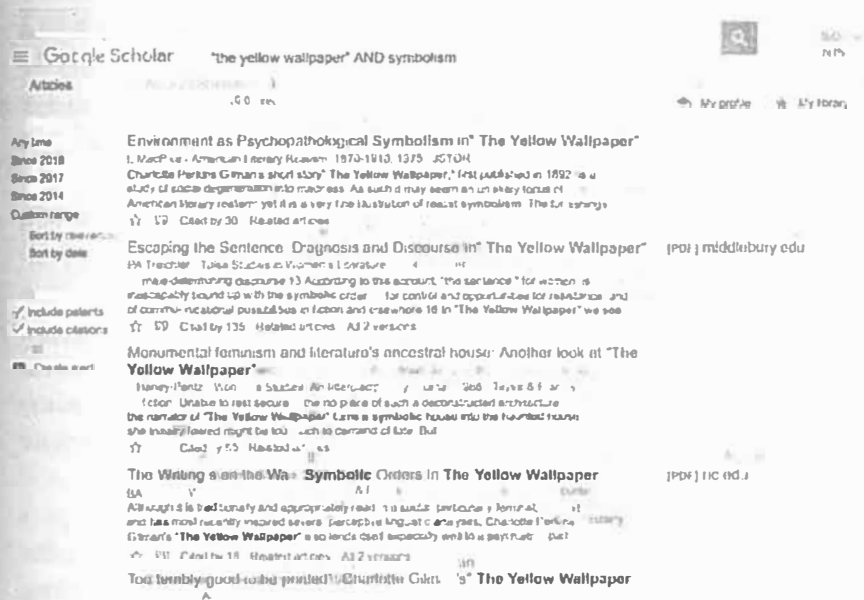


Fig. 27. *Google Scholar* search results

your results by date or by relevance. There are not as many options in *Google Scholar* as are available to you in a library database, but with those that are available you can limit or expand your results in the same way you would in a library database, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

When you use *Google Scholar*, there will sometimes be sources among your results that may not fulfill the requirements of your research assignment—for example, book reviews and dissertations. A quick way to find out whether what you are looking at is an academic article is to look for the name of the journal. If you are not familiar with the scholarly journals in the field, you can learn about the journal from a quick Internet search or in your library database. Book reviews are tricky because they are often published in peer-reviewed journals, typically at the end of an issue after all the articles. Because of where they are published, *Google Scholar*—and many library databases as well—sometimes mistakenly includes them as peer-reviewed, scholarly articles. Look for the word "review" somewhere in the search result, header, title, or first paragraph of the document. Look also at the length: a book review is usually much shorter than a scholarly article. If still in doubt, read the first few paragraphs. If it seems like a summary of a book or sounds like someone giving an opinion on a book instead of analyzing or interpreting it critically, then it is probably a book review. A book review has its uses in academic research, especially if it is contemporary to the author, as discussed in chapter 5, but it is not the same thing as a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal article.

A **dissertation** is a long paper written to meet a requirement of a doctoral program, which means that the author is a student—an advanced student, admittedly, but still a student. Although dissertations are reviewed by a committee of professors, they are not published unless they are reworked and explicitly submitted for publication after the student receives a PhD. Dissertations look and sound scholarly, but many professors will not accept them for research assignments that require peer-reviewed sources.

How will you know if you have come across a dissertation in your *Google Scholar* search? Look for the publisher. If it is a dissertation, the publisher will probably be the university that the student was attending. When in doubt, do some research into the publisher and look for a mis-

sion or scope note, often found on an "About" page. Even if you cannot use dissertations as cited sources in your research paper, they can still be useful to you in your research. Since they are written by students studying to become academic scholars, they have extensive bibliographies and often literature reviews, which summarize all the scholarship on the topic that had been published up to that point. These two elements of a dissertation can point you in the direction of peer-reviewed books and articles that will fit your professor's requirements.

Two useful tools that *Google Scholar* has that many library databases do not are the "Cited by" and "Related Articles" options. Links for these are below the blurb for the article on the results screen (fig. 27). You can click on "Cited by" to find other articles that are related to your topic, just as an article's works-cited list can point you to other books and articles relevant to your research—this method of research is called **citation chaining**. The "Cited by" option lists articles that have cited the article at hand, which means that they were published after the article was published. Used together, the works-cited section of your article and the "Cited by" list should give you a good sense of the scholarly literature on the topic your article discusses—both before and since its publication. Note that a list of relevant articles created by a researcher (i.e., the works-cited list) will be of greater value to you than that produced by an algorithm, on the principle that a human being can make more nuanced connections between topics than a computer can.

Accessing Scholarship Online

You may find the Internet in general and *Google Scholar* in particular to be more familiar and convenient to use than your library's databases, but be aware that scholarly materials are not, for the most part, available for free online to anyone who wants to read them. College and university libraries pay for scholarly books—both those in print and electronic—and pay subscription fees to scholarly journals and database vendors in order to be able to make scholarly literature available to students. You have already paid for access to this literature, because part of the library's budget comes from your tuition dollars.

The Internet, on the other hand, does not know that you are an enrolled student, so often you will be taken to a page that asks you to pay for access to an article. Or, if you are interested in a book, you will be able to view only a snippet of it and be directed to a site where you can buy it. The fee to access an article can be anywhere from twenty-five to ninety dollars, and scholarly books sometimes cost more. But you should not have to pay for any of these materials: let your library obtain for you any book or article you find on *Google Scholar* or the open Internet.

Thankfully, *Google Scholar* does provide a way to link articles found through its search directly to your campus library's holdings. This linking may happen automatically on campus computers, depending on your college or university, but you may have to enable it. Go into *Google Scholar's* settings and look for "Library Links." If you need help connecting *Google Scholar* to your college or university library or if you need an article you find on *Google Scholar* that your library does not have access to, ask a librarian for help. To access a scholarly book that you find in *Google Scholar* or from a general Internet search, do a search for it in your library's discovery system (see chapter 2).

There is an exception to this discussion of online access to scholarly materials: **open access**. As the term suggests, such scholarship is available online for free, immediately, and for use by anyone (see SPARC at sparcopen.org/open-access). In your Internet search you may come across open-access books or articles of scholarly literary criticism. These materials are peer-reviewed, just like their counterparts published by traditional journals or book presses, but it can be difficult to tell the difference between them and other Internet sources. Look for the phrase "open access" on the site and look for the universal symbol for open access, the open lock (fig. 28). Look for an "About" page for information



Fig. 28. "Open Access" symbol

about the mission of the publisher, the scope of what it publishes, and whether or not the material it publishes is peer-reviewed. If you are not sure whether or not material is open-access scholarship, ask a librarian.

Searching Smarter: Search Engine Advanced Tools

If your research assignment allows you to make use of sources outside the scholarly literature, you will likely want to search the Internet. We are confident we do not need to instruct you on how to do a basic search, but you may not know that most search engines have an advanced search interface or set of tools that function very much like the tools in a library database. Access to them depends on which search engine you use. They are sometimes hard to find, because links to them have been moved around and downgraded fairly frequently by search engines in recent years (Notess 43, 45).

Google and *Yahoo!* both have forms for advanced searching that lay out all the options available in one place, and a quick search on the main search engine page for “Google advanced search” or “Yahoo advanced search” will result in links to these pages.¹ The forms allow you to use Boolean operators to expand or limit your results. You can use them to search for exact phrases, number ranges, languages, regions or countries of the world, the last time the site was updated, the domain of the site (.com, .org, .edu, .gov), and more. Most of the advanced search options offered on the *Google* and *Yahoo!* forms can also be used in the basic search boxes for these search engines, as well as with other search engines like *Bing* and *DuckDuckGo*, by entering the necessary symbols or characters along with your keywords. The symbols and characters needed for each advanced operation are specified either on the advanced search forms themselves (for *Google* and *Yahoo!*) or on Web pages dedicated to listing all these symbols and characters (for *Bing* and *DuckDuckGo*).² The symbols and characters range from the simple to the complex. For instance, a simple search might make use of quotation marks around a phrase (e.g., “*The Yellow Wallpaper*”). A complex search

might make use of a series of parentheses and Boolean operators—for example, (“*The Yellow Wallpaper*” OR “*Charlotte Perkins Gilman*”) AND (feminism OR women).³

You will see the biggest difference in your results between an advanced search and a basic search when you are researching a topic that is controversial or commonly discussed in popular culture. For example, entering *Mark Twain censorship* in the basic *Google* search box will result in a first page of results made up mainly of quotation Web sites, pop culture Web sites, and opinion pieces from various media outlets—and most will date back to 2011 (fig. 29). They will probably not be acceptable for an academic research paper. Using the *Google* Advanced Search Form to make some changes to your search yields a more promising set of results. You can use it to specify that you want recent information (e.g., from the past year) and information only from educational Web

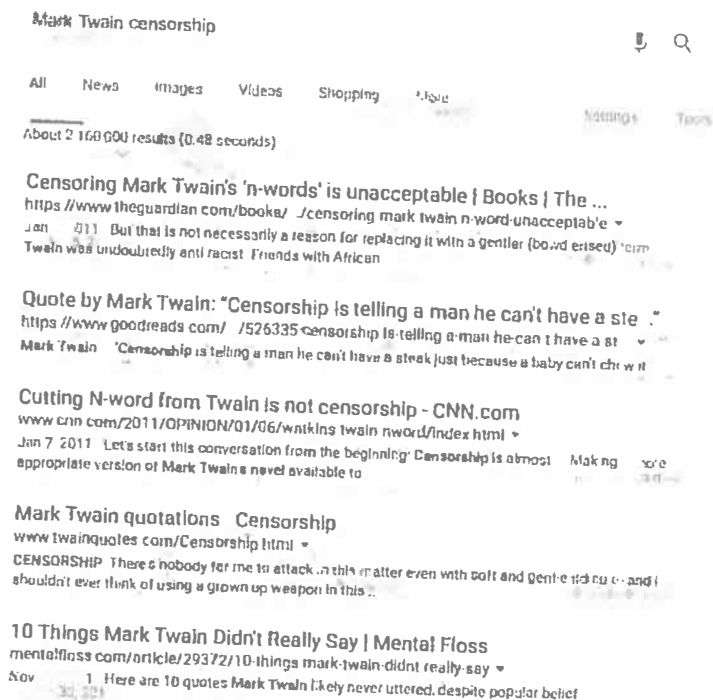


Fig. 29. Internet search results for *Mark Twain censorship*

sites (i.e., with .edu domains). Using these options will not ensure that the results are what you are looking for or that they are acceptable to your professor, but you will have more control over your search and be less at the mercy of the search engine's algorithm. The result of these two changes on our search for *Mark Twain censorship* is a completely different set of results on the first page (fig. 30).

Evaluating Internet Sources

It is important for you to know how to control and change your Internet search results because not all Web pages are suitable for academic work. Suitability is something you can intuit: looking at a page, you get a gut

The screenshot shows a search engine interface with the search query "Mark Twain censorship site:.edu". The search results are filtered to show only .edu domains. The results include:

- Banned Book contest sparks critical thinking - The Hornet**
https://homet.fulcoll.edu/banned-book-contest-sparks-critical-thinking/
Oct 30, 2018 - read a banned book and write an essay regarding its censorship through the love of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain originated from its...
- Adult Books - Banned and Censored - LibGuides at Spokane Falls ...**
https://libguides.spokanefalls.edu/Banned
May 7, 2018 - Banned and Censored. Adult Books. Complaints have been... More About Banned Books & Censorship... Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Twain, Mark.
- Frequently Banned Books - Banned Books - Taylor Library at ...**
https://library.fortbonne.edu/c.php?g=704444&p=5001674
Oct 3, 2018 - Reason: pro-communist ideas, sexuality. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain... Delete Censorship N p., 2006. Web. 20 Feb. 2014. "Banned
- Home - Banned Book Week - LibGuides at Florida Atlantic University**
libguides.fau.edu/bannedbookweek
Mar 28, 2018 - "Censorship is the child of fear and the father of ignorance" Laurie R. King
Author of such works like: *Speak, Chains, Fever* 1973 and *Urges*.
- Banned Books | Central Michigan University**
https://www.cmich.edu/library/Pages/bannedbooks.aspx

Fig. 30. Limiting your search to recent .edu sites

feeling about whether or not your professor will want you to use it as a source for your research assignment. But how can you be sure? What criteria cause this gut reaction? Examining that gut response can make you aware of the criteria, and then you can consciously and consistently apply them to any Web page.

There are many different models and checklists out there to help you evaluate a Web site. They all have their merits, but sometimes running through a checklist can turn off your critical thinking skills. You need those skills, because in today's information landscape there are no easy answers. You must stay alert and engaged with the information you are consuming, whether it is a *Facebook* post from your uncle or an academic article written by an expert. Therefore, instead of giving you a checklist to run through, we would rather that you ask yourself questions. They might be:

What Is This?

Take a moment, before you dive in, to figure out exactly what it is you are looking at. It is online, yes, but so is almost everything these days. Take in the whole page, the URL, the logos, and the images. Skim the text. Is this a news Web site? a blog? a PDF file? Where did it come from, and where is it hosted? Is it paid for by a company, an association, or advertisers? The Web site of a college or university? The Web site of a publisher or vendor? Is it located in a database of some sort?

If it is a news Web site, you will want to know who wrote the article, where the writer got the information, and what experience or credentials give the writer expertise on the topic. Does the article employ standards of journalistic objectivity, or is the writer giving an opinion (known as an op-ed)? It is not that one of these is good and one is bad, but knowing which it is should inform your decision about if and how to use the information it presents. If it is a scholarly article in a database, you will want to see whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed and in your field, and you may want to learn more about the scholar and the scholar's credentials. If it is a PDF, you will want to figure out where it came from—from a scholarly journal, or is it perhaps a term paper that another undergraduate scanned and put online?

What Is My Initial Response to This Web Site?

After using the Internet for many years, you have developed a sense of which Web sites are trustworthy and which are not. Go with that gut reaction—it is probably leading you in the right direction. But take the time to examine your reaction and put it into words. **Confirmation bias** is a normal response: you tend to believe something that confirms what you already think to be true or supports an opinion you already hold, and you tend not to accept information that goes against what you already believe. But when you do research, the whole point is to learn **new things!** So take a step back and ask yourself why your initial reaction was either positive or negative.

Does your gut tell you that this site will be a good source for your research? Why or why not? Do the ads on the site make you skeptical? What about them gives you that impression? Does the fact that the URL ends with a .gov or .org make you confident? On today's Internet, there are many different domains, and most of them (including .org and .edu) are available to anybody or any organization, so you need to dig deeper. Does the tone of the writing suggest that the writer is expressing an opinion? What is that opinion based on, evidence and research or other people's opinions? Questions like these should lead to other questions, and you continue to move along.

Who Is Responsible for This Web Site?

There should be an author credited on the Web page you are considering. If so, who is it? What are the person's credentials? What experiences or training or education makes the person an expert or **authority** on the subject? If an opinion is given, what reason do you have to trust it? Take a look at the evidence cited and links included—does it all seem solid? If the author is telling you about research that someone else has done, how can you check that research? Are there references you can use, links that take you to the source of the information? Use such links to verify claims as you would use references in an article.

Besides the author, who bears responsibility for the content? Who published the article? Is it a news outlet? a nonprofit organization? a

business or company? an academic journal? What credentials does the publisher have? If the publisher is an organization, can you look up some of the people in the organization? Often information about them can be found on an "About" or "Mission" page. You can also search the Internet for the people involved in the site. What else have they published? What is their reputation? What other sites or outlets do they write for?

When Was This Web Site Written or Published?

Does the Web site have a date on it? If the article or page you are considering does not have one, try looking for the date when the page or site was last revised—that might give you an idea of how old the article or page is. Given the time it was written, is the article still relevant today? If you cannot find a date for a Web site or Web page, is there a way to tell, without the date, that the information on it is still relevant?

The answer to these questions will depend on your topic and the field you are researching. Research and information in literature do not become obsolete as quickly as they do in other disciplines—*Moby-Dick* is still *Moby-Dick* whether someone wrote about it this year or fifty years ago. It is usually acceptable therefore to use literary essays written many years ago. But the acceptability can vary by topic.

Keep asking questions until you feel confident that your evaluation process has led you to a decision about whether or not to use the source for your assignment. The point at which this happens will be different for different people and for different sources.

Evaluating Library Sources

Perhaps the complexities of searching for academically appropriate content on the Internet have made you decide to use your library's databases instead. Searching in these databases means that you can definitely rely on the sources you find. . . right? Not necessarily! The need for you to evaluate sources does not disappear because you are using library databases and scholarly books and articles instead of Web pages. You should make sure that every source of information you use, no matter what it

is or where it comes from, is both trustworthy and a good fit for your current context—keeping in mind that no source is the right choice in every circumstance. Many library databases these days include records for all types of information—things you will also find on the open Internet, such as magazines, newspapers, and *Wikipedia* articles—and some will not be acceptable to your professor. Scholarly articles and books also need scrutiny. Articles are retracted regularly for mistakes or outright fraud, though this retraction is more common in the sciences than in the humanities and other disciplines (Fox 69).

All information sources, including scholarly sources, are written by human beings, and human beings, even those with PhDs and impressive credentials, are fallible. Their work may go through highly rigorous peer review, but not all research has equal merit. Therefore you should always evaluate. Is a source trustworthy? Is a piece of information credible? Is the author of a work an authority? Is the work relevant to your topic? Is it good for your purpose or only adequate? Though it may be tempting to settle for the first source you find that has information on your topic, your research papers will always be better if you apply a critical eye to your options and choose the source (be that an article, book, or Web page) that is the best fit for your argument or interpretation.

Notes

1. As of the writing of this volume, the URL for *Google's* Advanced Search Form is www.google.com/advanced_search and the URL for *Yahoo's* Advanced Search Form is www.yahoo.com/r/so.

2. As of the writing of this volume, a list of search refinements for *Google* can be found at support.google.com/websearch/answer/2466433. The Advanced Operator Reference page for *Bing* is located at msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ff795620.aspx. The Search Syntax page for *DuckDuckGo* is located at duck.co/help/results/syntax.

3. The AND in this example search is unnecessary in *Google*, because that search engine assumes that a space between words that are not enclosed in quotations marks means “and.” In other search engines, you will need the AND. In any case, including it will help you keep track of your more complicated searches.

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