

Research Essentials

Canvas Course Preview Online Information Literacy Course

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Research Essentials

Research Essentials



Academic research involves more than locating information. Researchers must develop focused questions, choose appropriate sources, search strategically, evaluate what they find, and use information responsibly.

Research Essentials introduces this process through five sequential modules. Each module combines concise instruction, practical examples, guided practice, discussion, and applied activities.

Throughout the course, you will develop a Research Portfolio that documents your progress from an initial topic to a set of selected, evaluated, and responsibly cited sources.

Intended audience

This course is designed primarily for undergraduate students who are beginning to complete college-level research assignments. The strategies can also support more experienced students who want to strengthen their research practices.

Course organization

1. Understanding the Research Process
2. Developing a Research Question
3. Choosing and Finding Sources
4. Evaluating Information and Sources
5. Using and Citing Sources Responsibly

[Begin the Course](#)

The course home page introduces the purpose, intended audience, and module structure while providing a clear entry point into the course.

Modules

[Expand All](#)[View Progress](#)[✔ Publish All ▼](#)[+ Module](#)

☰ ▶ Course Orientation

✔ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Module 1: Understanding the Research Process

○ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Module 2: Developing a Research Question

○ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Module 3: Choosing and Finding Sources

Complete All Items ✔ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Module 4: Evaluating Information and Sources

○ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Module 5: Using and Citing Sources Responsibly

○ ▼ + ⋮

☰ ▶ Course Completion: Research Portfolio

○ ▼ + ⋮

The course is organized into six sequential modules that guide learners through the research process, with orientation and completion modules serving as bookends.

Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

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Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

Course purpose

Research Essentials prepares students to make informed decisions throughout the research process. The course emphasizes transferable strategies that can be applied across disciplines, assignments, library systems, and information environments.

Course learning outcomes

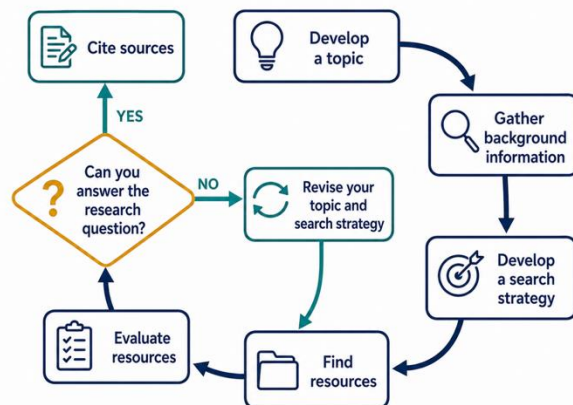
By the end of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the major stages of the research process and how those stages interact.
2. Develop a focused research question and identify its main concepts.
3. Select appropriate source types and apply effective strategies to locate relevant information.
4. Evaluate sources based on their relevance, authority, evidence, context, and purpose.
5. Integrate and cite information responsibly in an academic project.
6. Reflect on and revise their research decisions throughout the process.

The research process

Research is rarely a perfectly linear process. As you gather and evaluate information, you may discover that you need to revise your topic, research question, or search strategy. This course guides you through the major stages of that process.

The Research Process



The process begins with developing a topic and gathering background information. You then develop a search strategy, locate sources, and evaluate whether they provide enough evidence to answer the research question. If they do not, you return to the topic or search strategy and revise your approach. Once you have assembled appropriate evidence, you document and cite the sources.

Course assessment

Learning will be demonstrated through:

- Guided practice activities
- Scenario-based knowledge checks
- Discussions and peer responses
- Applied module assignments
- A cumulative Research Portfolio
- A final reflection

The course overview introduces the learning outcomes and provides a visual roadmap of the research process that frames the course's instructional modules.

Research Portfolio Overview

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Research Portfolio Overview

Build your research project one step at a time

Throughout the course, you will develop a Research Portfolio based on a research question of your choice or one provided by your instructor.

Research Portfolio milestones

Each content module contributes one milestone to the cumulative Research Portfolio:

1. **Research Assignment Analysis**
Identify the assignment's purpose, audience, requirements, and research tasks.
2. **Topic and Question Proposal**
Develop a focused topic, gather background information, and formulate a research question.
3. **Search Strategy and Research Source Set**
Create keywords and search statements, then locate a book, scholarly journal article, and newspaper article.
4. **Source Evaluation**
Evaluate one selected source for relevance, authority, evidence, context, and purpose.
5. **Integrated and Cited Source**
Quote, paraphrase, or summarize source material and provide appropriate attribution and citation.

Course completion

At the end of the course, you will:

- Revise and combine the five milestones into a coherent **Final Research Portfolio**.
- Complete a separate **Final Reflection** examining how your research process changed during the course.

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The Research Portfolio serves as the course's culminating authentic assessment, with learners building their portfolio incrementally as they apply skills and concepts from each module.

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▼ Module 3: Choosing and Finding Sources

Complete All Items



Start Here



Module 3 Overview

Viewed



Learn and Practice



Choose the Right Source

Viewed



Practice: Match the Source to the Need

4 pts Scored at least 3.0



Build a Search Strategy

Viewed



Finding Books

Viewed



Finding Scholarly Journal Articles

Viewed



Finding Newspaper Articles

Viewed



Apply and Complete



Discussion: Source Choices in Context

Contributed



Apply: Build a Research Source Set

20 pts Submitted



Module 3 Knowledge Check

6 pts Scored at least 5.0



Module 3 Summary

Viewed



The expanded Module 3 view shows the intentional sequence of learning objectives, instructional content, tutorials, discussion, and applied assessment within a representative module.

Module 3 Overview

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Module 3 Overview

Module 3: Choosing and Finding Sources

You have developed a focused research question. Now imagine entering that entire question into a library database and receiving thousands of loosely related results—or almost none. Finding useful information requires both translating your research question into terms a database can effectively search and choosing the right kinds of sources.

Academic research usually requires more than one kind of source. A book may help you understand the history of a subject, a scholarly journal article may provide evidence from a focused study, and a newspaper article may show how a current event is being reported. In this module, you will learn how to decide which source type fits a particular information need, develop and revise a basic search strategy, and locate books, scholarly journal articles, and newspaper articles using academic library search tools.

Learning objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

1. Distinguish between books, scholarly journal articles, and newspaper articles based on their characteristics and uses.
2. Select an appropriate source type for a specific research need.
3. Construct a basic search using keywords, synonyms, phrases, and Boolean operators.
4. Locate relevant sources and explain how each could contribute to an academic research project.

What you will do

During this module, you will:

- Compare three common types of research sources.
- Practice matching information needs with appropriate source types.
- Develop keywords and search statements for a research question.
- View demonstrations of how to find books, scholarly journal articles, and newspaper articles.
- Locate and explain a set of sources for a research project.
- Complete a short knowledge check.

Select **Next** to begin.

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Each module begins with an overview that establishes its purpose, connects the topic to the broader research process, and presents clear, measurable learning objectives.

Choose the Right Source

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Choose the Right Source

Different source types serve different purposes. Before beginning a search, consider what kind of information you need.

Books

Books are particularly useful when you need:

- A broad overview of a subject
- Historical background
- An in-depth examination of a complex topic
- Theories or ideas developed across multiple chapters

Because books take time to write and publish, they may not contain the most current information about a rapidly changing issue.

Example: A book about the historical development of social media could help explain how online communication has changed over time.

Scholarly journal articles

Scholarly journal articles are particularly useful when you need:

- Focused research on a specific question
- Evidence from an original study
- Analysis written by researchers or subject specialists
- Detailed information about research methods and findings

Scholarly articles generally include citations and a reference list. Many are peer reviewed, meaning that other experts evaluate the work before publication.

Example: A scholarly study could provide evidence about the relationship between social media use and sleep among college students.

A database can contain several source types. Do not assume that every result found through an academic database is a scholarly article. Examine the publication, author information, abstract, references, and any peer-reviewed or source-type indicators.

Newspaper articles

Newspaper articles are particularly useful when you need:

- Recent reporting about an event
- Public statements and interviews
- Local, national, or international coverage
- Information about how an issue developed over days or weeks

Newspaper reporting can provide timely information, but it generally does not offer the depth or research methodology found in scholarly literature.

Example: A newspaper article could report on a university's newly announced policy governing social media use.

Compare the source types

Common strengths and limitations of source types		
Source type	Common strength	Common limitation
Book	Broad context and sustained analysis	May not reflect the latest developments
Scholarly journal article	Focused research and disciplinary evidence	Can be technical or narrowly focused
Newspaper article	Timely reporting and current perspectives	Usually provides less depth than scholarly research

Most projects use more than one type

A source is not automatically better because it is a book, journal article, or newspaper article. Its value depends on your research question and the information you need.

For example, a paper about social media and student well-being might use:

- A book to establish historical or cultural context
- Scholarly articles to provide research evidence
- Newspaper articles to illustrate current debates or recent developments

Select **Next** to practice choosing the most appropriate source.

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Instructional content combines concise explanations with a visual comparison table to help learners distinguish among source types and select appropriate sources.

Build a Search Strategy

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Build a Search Strategy

A research question is written for a human reader, but a library catalog or database searches for the words you enter. Before searching, identify the most important concepts in your question and consider other words that could express those concepts.

We will use this research question as an example:

How does social media use affect sleep among college students?

Step 1: Identify the main concepts

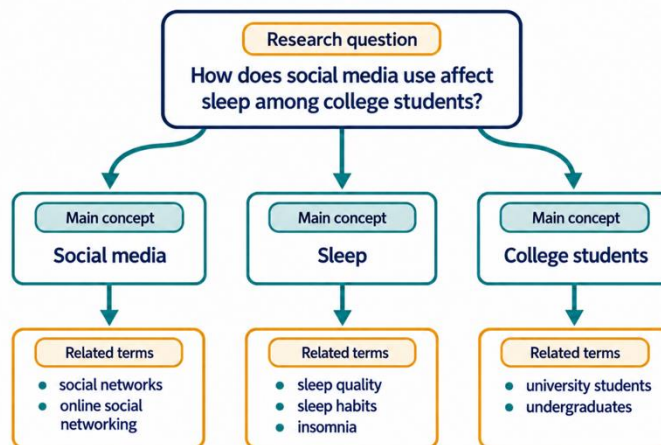
Remove words that describe the relationship you are investigating, such as "how does" and "affect." The main concepts are:

- Social media
- Sleep
- College students

Step 2: Generate keywords and synonyms

Different authors may use different terms to describe the same idea. Creating alternatives can help you find results that do not use your original wording. The diagram below shows how the example research question can be divided into main concepts and related search terms.

From a Research Question to Search Terms



► View a text version of the diagram

You do not need to use every possible term in the first search. Start with a few strong terms and revise based on your results.

Step 3: Search for exact phrases

Place quotation marks around words that should remain together as a phrase.

Examples:

- "social media"
- "sleep quality"
- "college students"

Without quotation marks, a search tool may look for each word separately.

Step 4: Connect different concepts with AND

Use **AND** between different concepts when you want results that address all of them.

"social media" AND sleep AND "college students"

Adding another concept with AND generally narrows a search because each result must include all the requested concepts.

A visual framework and worked example scaffold the process of translating a research question into effective search terms and strategies.

Finding Scholarly Journal Articles

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Finding Scholarly Journal Articles

Scholarly journal articles can provide focused research, evidence, and analysis written for an academic or professional audience. This tutorial demonstrates how to search several databases at once through the EBSCOhost platform.

As you watch, notice how the searcher:

- Accesses EBSCOhost through the library's Databases A-Z page.
- Selects multiple databases to search simultaneously.
- Places separate concepts in different search boxes.
- Connects the concepts **performing arts** and **COVID-19** with **AND**.
- Reviews titles and source information in the results list.
- Uses subject terms to narrow or redirect the search.
- Identifies different full-text access options.
- Opens the complete article when it is available.
- Uses database tools for actions such as emailing or citing a record.

Video: Finding Articles in the Library Databases



Video accessibility: Closed captions are available in the video player.

Searching across databases

A multidisciplinary platform such as EBSCOhost may contain material from academic journals, magazines, newspapers, and trade publications. Finding an item in EBSCOhost does not automatically mean that it is a scholarly journal article. Examine the record and the publication before deciding what kind of source you have found.

What to record when you find an article

- Article title
- Author or authors
- Journal or publication title
- Publication date
- Volume, issue, and page numbers when available
- DOI or stable link
- Database used
- Search terms that produced the result

What is a stable link? A stable link is a persistent web address designed to continue working after your search session ends. In a library database or catalog record, look for a link labeled **Permalink**, **Persistent Link**, **Share**, **Record URL**, or **DOI**. Do not copy a temporary database URL from your browser's address bar unless the database identifies it as a stable link. For a print book, you may provide the call number or a basic citation instead.

An embedded video tutorial provides step-by-step guidance for finding scholarly journal articles, with supporting content reinforcing key search techniques.

Module 3 Discussion

Discussion: Source Choices in Context

Discussion prompt

One question, different sources

Books, scholarly journal articles, and newspaper articles can all contribute to a research project, but they provide different kinds of information.

Use the focused research question you developed in Module 2. In your initial post:

1. State your research question.
2. Explain how a book could contribute to your research.
3. Explain how a scholarly journal article could contribute to your research.
4. Explain how a newspaper article could contribute to your research.
5. Identify which source type you expect to be most useful and explain why.
6. One source type may be less useful for your particular question. If so, explain its limitations rather than forcing an artificial use for it.

Your initial post should be approximately 150–200 words.

Respond to a classmate

Respond to at least one classmate. Consider the classmate's research question and source choices. Suggest one additional way that one of the three source types could contribute to the project, or explain why a different source type might be especially useful.

Your response should be approximately 75–100 words.

Discussion expectations

Posts should:

- Apply concepts from the module
- Explain the reasoning behind source choices
- Use specific examples
- Respond constructively to classmates
- Be written clearly and respectfully

Reply

The module discussion gives learners an opportunity to apply search strategies, reflect on their research process, and learn from their peers' approaches.

Module 3 Assignment

Apply: Build a Research Source Set

[Start Assignment](#)

Due No Due Date **Points** 20 **Submitting** a text entry box or a file upload
File Types doc, docx, and pdf **Attempts** 0 **Allowed Attempts** 2

In Module 2, you developed a focused research question. In this assignment, you will use that question to develop a basic search strategy and locate three different types of sources.

The purpose is to practice selecting and finding sources—not to write the complete research paper.

Step 1: Research question

Enter the focused research question you developed in Module 2. If you revised your question after receiving feedback or beginning your research, enter the revised version.

Step 2: Develop a search strategy

Identify:

- Two or three main concepts from your question
- At least one related term or synonym for each concept
- Two search statements using quotation marks, AND, or OR

Step 3: Locate three sources

Use your college or university library's website to locate three sources related to your research question:

- One book
- One scholarly journal article
- One newspaper article

Use the library catalog, discovery search, or appropriate research databases demonstrated in this module. Apply keywords from your search strategy and revise your terms, filters, or subject headings when needed.

For this practice assignment, you must find all three source types so that you can compare their characteristics and potential contributions. In an actual research project, the appropriate combination of sources will depend on your research question and assignment requirements.

Then document each source and your search process in Step 4.

Step 4: Document your results

For each source, provide:

1. Source title
2. Author or organization
3. Source type
4. Publication date
5. The library search tool or database used
6. The search terms or search statement used
7. Any filter or subject term that helped refine the search
8. A stable link, DOI, call number, permalink, or basic citation
9. A brief explanation of why the item qualifies as the required source type
10. A two- or three-sentence explanation of how the source could contribute to the research project

What is a stable link? A stable link is a persistent web address designed to continue working after your search session ends. In a library database or catalog record, look for a link labeled **Permalink**, **Persistent Link**, **Share**, **Record URL**, or **DOI**. Do not copy a temporary database URL from your browser's address bar unless the database identifies it as a stable link. For a print book, you may provide the call number or a basic citation instead.

Formal MLA or APA formatting is not required for this activity.

Step 5: Reflect on your search

In approximately 100 words, respond to the following questions:

- Which source was easiest to locate?
- Which source was most difficult to locate?
- How did you revise your search strategy?
- Which source appears most useful for your research question, and why?

The module assignment asks learners to apply their search skills to their own research topic while completing a component of the culminating Research Portfolio.

Module 3 Assignment Rubric

Rubric for Build a Research Source Set

Criteria	Ratings				Pts
Search strategy	4 pts Proficient Identifies appropriate concepts and synonyms and constructs two effective search statements using relevant search techniques.	3 pts Mostly proficient Identifies appropriate concepts and constructs usable searches, with minor weaknesses in synonyms or syntax.	2 pts Developing Search concepts or statements are incomplete, overly broad, or insufficiently connected to the research question.	0 pts Incomplete Search strategy is missing or does not address the research question.	4 pts
Required source types	4 pts Proficient Provides one book, one scholarly journal article, and one newspaper article, with each source type identified correctly.	3 pts Mostly proficient Provides all three sources but misidentifies one source type or includes one questionable selection.	2 pts Developing Provides only two appropriate source types or misidentifies multiple sources.	0 pts Incomplete Provides one or no appropriate sources.	4 pts
Relevance	4 pts Proficient All three sources are clearly relevant to the selected research question.	3 pts Mostly proficient Most sources are relevant, although one has a weak or indirect connection.	2 pts Developing Relevance is unclear for two or more sources.	0 pts Incomplete Sources do not address the research question.	4 pts
Explanation of contribution	4 pts Proficient Clearly explains the distinct contribution each source could make to the research project.	3 pts Mostly proficient Explains the contribution of each source, but one or more explanations lack specificity.	2 pts Developing Explanations primarily summarize the sources without connecting them to the research project.	0 pts Incomplete Explanations are missing or do not address how the sources would contribute.	4 pts
Documentation and reflection	4 pts Proficient Provides all requested source and search information and a thoughtful reflection on the search process.	3 pts Mostly proficient Provides most requested information and an adequate reflection.	2 pts Developing Several required details are missing or the reflection is minimal.	0 pts Incomplete Documentation and reflection are substantially incomplete.	4 pts
Total Points: 20					

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The assignment rubric aligns evaluation criteria with the module learning objectives and provides learners with clear expectations for successful performance.

Module 3 Summary

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Module 3 Summary

Module Summary

Academic research involves choosing sources strategically rather than searching for information without first considering what you need.

In this module, you learned that:

- Books can provide broad context, historical background, and sustained analysis.
- Scholarly journal articles can provide focused research, disciplinary analysis, and evidence.
- Newspaper articles can provide timely reporting, public reactions, and local or current perspectives.
- Keywords and synonyms help translate a research question into searchable concepts.
- Quotation marks keep phrases together.
- AND connects different concepts and generally narrows a search.
- OR connects related terms and generally broadens a search.
- Searching is iterative, and researchers revise their strategies after reviewing results.

How to Use What You've Learned

Use the source-selection and search strategies from this module whenever you begin a new research assignment, and continue revising your terms as your understanding of the topic develops.

Complete the module

Before finishing, make sure you have:

- Completed [Practice: Match the Source to the Need](#)
- Contributed to [Discussion: Source Choices in Context](#)
- Submitted [Apply: Build a Research Source Set](#)
- Completed the [Module 3 Knowledge Check](#)

What comes next?

Finding sources is not the end of the research process. Researchers must also evaluate whether sources are credible, relevant, accurate, and appropriate for the question being investigated. In Module 4, you will evaluate the sources you have found.

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The module summary reinforces key takeaways and provides completion indicators that help learners confirm their progress before moving to the next module.