Choosing Research Resources

The first thing you need to know

- Library staff are here to help.
  - Reference librarians are experts in understanding how information is organized and what techniques will get you to the information you need.
  - Reference services may be obtained in-person at the library, by phone at 361/698-1311 during regular library hours, or by email.
    - Email questions may be sent to the library 24 hours a day / 7 days per week. Reference librarian replies generally are made in less than 24 hours.
  - Reference librarians will give you assistance in choosing resources and choosing search terms as well as guidance throughout the research process. However, reference librarians won't do the research for you.
  - Reference librarians give research assistance and general guidance in the research paper process. The Del Mar College Stone Writing Center gives more extensive research paper assistance, such as giving more detailed writing guidance and tutoring.

What is research?

- Research is the process of seeking, obtaining and understanding information.
  - According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary...
    - "Research: (1): careful or diligent search (2): studious inquiry or examination; especially: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws (3): the collecting of information about a particular subject"
  - Research is an important component of your education.
    - The research process helps you understand how information is organized. By doing research in your major field you'll understand how to find information you need at work to successfully do your job.
    - Research helps teach critical thinking. Critical thinking is evaluating and analyzing information rather than just accepting what you see, hear and read at face value
Why not start with the Web?

- While the web is great for many searches, it's not always the best place to start. Read on and find out about other types of resources. Many of them are full-text and online.
  - Need convincing? Read these reasons not to start on the Web.
    - 10 Reasons Why the Internet Is No Substitute For a Library
    - Top Ten Reasons TexShare Is Better Than Just Surfing the Internet

Encyclopedias

- Encyclopedias are collections of information, generally organized alphabetically by heading or article title.
  - Remember that most encyclopedias have an index, usually the last volume. The index will give you references to all occurrences of your topic in addition to the main article.
- Encyclopedias are good places to start when you are seeking an overview or know little about the research topic.
  - If your instructor says not to cite encyclopedias in your research, they're still good places to start. Use the information you learn from the encyclopedia to make your searches of other resources more efficient.
- Encyclopedias have authenticated information.
  - Articles in an encyclopedia have been written by experts in every field. Information contained in an encyclopedia is accepted as being accurate.
- Encyclopedias can be good sources of statistical information.
- There are two main types of encyclopedias
  - General encyclopedias, like *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana*, try to cover everything.
  - Subject encyclopedias, like *Encyclopedia of Surfing* and *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, give comprehensive overview of a particular subject area. There are subject encyclopedias for almost every interest.
- Encyclopedias are available in different formats.
  - Encyclopedias in book format are located in the Reference Area. Some older editions are available for check-out from the regular book collection on the 3rd Floor of the William F. White, Jr. Library on the Del Mar College East Campus.
    - Search for encyclopedias by using the [DMCnet Library Catalog](https://www.delmarcc.edu/library/catalog). Try both spellings: Encyclopedia and Encyclopaedia.
  - Microsoft Encarta is a digital encyclopedia available on the computers in the Reference Area and Student Technology Center.
  - [Online general and subject encyclopedias are available through this link](https://www.delmarcc.edu/library/digital_resources/).
Eight-nine subject encyclopedias are available full-text online through NetLibrary.

- Search on the word "encyclopedia" to find all 89.
- NetLibrary ebooks can also be searched in the DMCnet Library Catalog.
- Oxford Reference Online also has a large number of subject encyclopedias.

Books

- Books are still the best place to start for in-depth coverage of a topic.
  - Since books are generally written by experts in their field and are reviewed by editors, they are considered to have a high level of accuracy.
  - Most people find books easier to read than online text when reading material of longer content.
  - Books are better than online text when trying to understand a new concept or procedure with many steps.
  - Studies have shown that online readers tend to scan online content rather than read word by word, take 25% longer to read, and retain less of what they read.

- Use the DMCnet Library Catalog to find books.
  - The DMCnet Library Catalog is a search tool for books and other materials owned by the library.
  - The search results on the DMCnet Library Catalog will tell whether it's available for use, which library building has the book, in what part of the building it's located, and a call number to show where on the shelf it's located.
  - Can't find an entire book on your topic? Try searching for a broader topic and looking for a chapter or section specifically on your topic.
  - Use the book's index to target sections about your topic.

- Over 28,000 books can be accessed full-text online through NetLibrary.
  - NetLibrary ebooks may be searched using either NetLibrary's search tool or using the DMCnet Library Catalog.

Magazines, Journals, Periodicals, Newspapers and Articles

- Journals and Periodicals are also commonly called Magazines.
  - Magazine articles generally have good coverage of current topics.
  - Magazine articles tend to have more current information since they are written and go to press much faster than books do.
  - Magazine articles are seen as generally accurate as the article contents receive editorial review.
  - Peer reviewed magazine or journal articles are respected as very accurate as a panel of experts
review the article before it goes to press.

- Look for the check box on the Ebsco database to limit your results to peer reviewed articles.

- Print magazines and newspapers are located on the second floor.
  - The term "print magazine" refers to magazines in their traditional paper format.
  - Browsing is to flip through magazines to see what's new.
    - Browsing is useful when looking for new trends or ideas, but it's not too useful when researching a specific topic.
  - Print magazines available at the library are included in the DMCnet Library Catalog.
    - It will include information about the magazine title and subject as well as what issues are owned, but not information about the articles inside.
    - The one technique to search for magazines in the DMCnet Library Catalog is to
      - Choose Power Search on the bottom of the regular search box
      - Put the search strategy for your general magazine topic in the top search box
      - In the Item Type box, select Periodicals
      - Then press enter or click the Search button

- A printed list of print magazines is available for use in the Reference Area.
- Use online library databases to search for magazine articles.
  - Online library databases allow you to search for topics among thousands of magazines. In many cases, the complete article is available online in full-text. Ebsco also has an indicator that shows when the library has the print copy of the magazine or journal.
  - There are many online databases listed on the library homepage and on the Reference Resources page.
  - Ebsco or eLibrary are generally good databases to start with.
  - Online newspaper databases can be found through this link.
    - Newsbank has newspaper articles from eleven Texas newspapers and 17 from cities in other states.

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**Audio-Visual Media**

- The library has thousands of VHS videocassettes & DVD videos as well as audio Long Playing vinyl record albums & CD's available for use. A few CD audiobooks are also available.
- All audio-visual materials are included in the DMCnet Library Catalog.
- There is an online Audio CD List that is updated periodically.
  - This list is good for browsing or searching for a specific CD by title, composer of major works or main performer.
  - The DMCnet Library Catalog is more up to date.
  - The DMCnet Library Catalog has many more search options and is better for searching for classical music by name of work.
- There is a list of Feature Films, Operas and Stage Musicals.
  - This list is good for browsing by title for the Feature Films, Operas and Musicals by Title.
  - The list includes VHS, DVD and a small number of Sony Betamax videos.
  - This list is updated periodically, but the DMCnet Library Catalog has more search features and is more up to date.

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**Web Resources**

- Web resources in this context refers to information that is freely available on the internet.
- Web resources should be used cautiously.
  - While some sites on the web are highly authenticated and accurate many are not.
    - There is no person, institution or agency that makes sure information on the web is correct.
    - There is no person, institution or agency that controls what's put on the web.
Information on the web may be wrong because...

- the information is faulty
- the information was based on outdated sources
- incorrect information was posted on purpose
- it's part of a satire or hoax site that is made to look genuine

To try to tell authenticated and accurate sites from inaccurate sites try some of these steps..

- Make sure the site lists a title and an author.
- Check to see when the site was last updated.
- Make sure the web address or "URL" (uniform resource locator) and the name of the site seem to go together.
  - For instance, if the site looks like its for a Fortune 500 company but the URL is from an angelfire.com or other free web hosting site, it's probably not genuine.
- URL's with tildes ~ tend to be personal sites on company or institutional websites and may be suspect.
- Look for information from reputable resources, such as professional organizations, governments, educational institutions, and so on.
  - Federal, state and local government websites often have URLs that end in .gov
  - Non-profit organizations often have websites with URLs that end in .org
  - College and university websites often have URLs that end in .edu
  - Sites from countries other than the US often end in a two-character code, such as .ca identifies a Canadian website.

  These are guidelines. Use this in conjunction with other identifiers to verify that a website is legitimate.

- Use the library's Websites by Subject list or Search Engines list as a place to start your web search.

- When A Search Engine Isn't Enough, Call A Librarian [NY Times newspaper article]

Review

- The Library Staff are here to assist your research.
- The research process is an important part of your education, teaching skills on finding information and critically evaluating its content.
- The World Wide Web is a good research tool, but not always the right one.
The library has many different types of resources, each with different strengths to aid your research.

Many of the library's resources are online, but don't overlook the resources available at the library.

Try a quiz to see what you've learned.

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This information was compiled by Reference & Automation Services Librarians at Del Mar College Library.

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