



Finding Appropriate Academic Material

Reading for Undergraduate Study

Modules provide you with a basic set of materials that form the core of your study. However, you will also have to find further information yourself, because part of an education at this level is developing the ability to determine the additional information you need.

- It requires particular skills to be selective in what you read, and the skills to locate and access it.
- Your textbooks are your first source of information. They tell you the names of key theorists and you can also follow up on the references, the bibliography or further reading lists provided.
- By selecting those that are relevant and expanding your reading through them, you are led on to other relevant materials with their own lists of references.



Finding Appropriate Academic Material

Think about what type of literature would be most useful to you. If you are new to the subject, then a generic text book might be a good starting place. However, if this is a subject area you know something about then you may wish to draw on the academic or professional literature to refine your knowledge.

- Watch this short video on **Scholarly vs Non-Scholarly** material which gives a good insight into the types of sources you can use:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nWSds6kQb0>
- Watch this short video on **evaluating sources for credibility** which gives a good insight into the types of things you should be looking out for with regards to their suitability:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLTOVoHbH5c>



Evaluating Academic Material

Once you've found some promising material, try to assess whether or not it is relevant so you don't waste time reading material of little value. Ask yourself the questions listed below:

Theme	Question
Relevance Look at the introduction or overview to check what it's about	Does the information match my needs?
Provenance Don't be tempted to use information that may not have academic credibility	Is it clear where the information has come from? Can I identify the authors or organisations responsible? How was it Published? Has it been peer reviewed?



Evaluating Academic Material

Theme	Question
Objectivity Look for an introduction or overview that describes affiliations or funding sources	Is the author's position or interest made clear? Does the author declare any connections that might compromise their independence? Is the language emotive? Are there hidden vested interests?
Timeliness Don't risk using obsolete evidence or data	Is it clear when the information was produced? Does the date of the information meet my requirements?
Presentation Look at language, layout and structure to check whether you can use it confidently	Is the information clearly communicated?
Method Be aware of the differences in research methods	What research methods were used, and how are results reported? Do I need to check how significant the results actually are?



Primary and Secondary Sources

You should also appreciate the difference between primary and secondary sources in academic literature.

- A **primary source** is the original publication of information, including any 'raw' data, usually with an appropriate statistical analysis.
- A **secondary source** is a subsequent publication that draws on the original, quite possibly for different purposes. You may have read of instances where a publication applied an inappropriate analysis of someone else's material, thus producing misleading findings. A secondary source should acknowledge where its information comes from, so readers may refer to the primary source to see how the material was originally obtained and reported.



Comparing Academic Sources

Text Books

- Strengths
 - Text books can present a focused view of a key issue. In producing a text with a specific theme, the author has drawn on a range of sources and synthesised these into a set of coherent arguments.
 - Text books often highlight the key features of lengthier pieces of work, and also provide you with the full bibliographic references of the primary material.
 - Multi-themed text books, for example overviews of areas such as organisational behaviour or accountancy, are useful in presenting a broad view of a field of study, the relationships between theoretical perspectives, the views of different authors, and the models and tools that they produce.



Comparing Academic Sources

- Limitations

- Text books that focus on a particular issue may present a very particular view. Each academic author has their own perspectives, views and positions, and these are reflected in their texts.
- Text books which cover a great range may suffer from the decisions made in selecting what to include, and so present a partial rather than a complete picture
- A general problem with text books is in the age of the information they contain. Book publishing can take anything up to two years, so even in a new book the information may be out of date.



Comparing Academic Sources

Academic Journals

- Strengths
 - Academic journals are a favoured source of academic information. They usually offer a more current view than do text books, and have credibility due to the process of peer review, under which journal articles ('papers') submitted by researchers are evaluated by experts in the field before being published.
 - They also approach the subject matter in a particular way. Journal articles are seen as being either theoretical or empirical.
 - **Theoretical** articles use reasoned debate to present new or alternative ways of thinking about a subject, or offer a critique of existing ways of thinking.
 - **Empirical** papers use new research to illuminate a subject in different ways, to offer new insights or a critique of the existing ways of thinking.



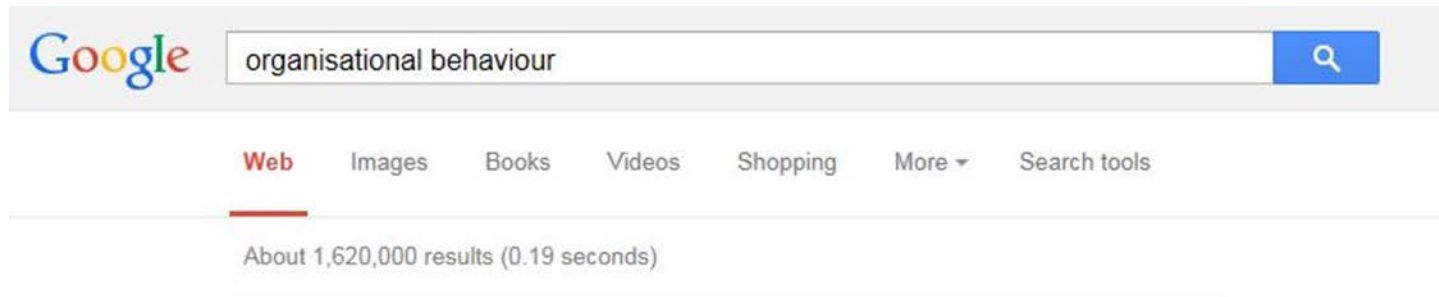
Comparing Academic Sources

- Limitations

- Whilst academic journals can present new and varied perspectives, some do this in rather inaccessible language. This is why you are sometimes directed to relevant and comprehensible journals by your module leader in their references or module handbook.
- Although academic journals are generally more current than text books published at the same time, it is worth remembering that some journals have a two-year waiting list for papers to be published



Searching Online

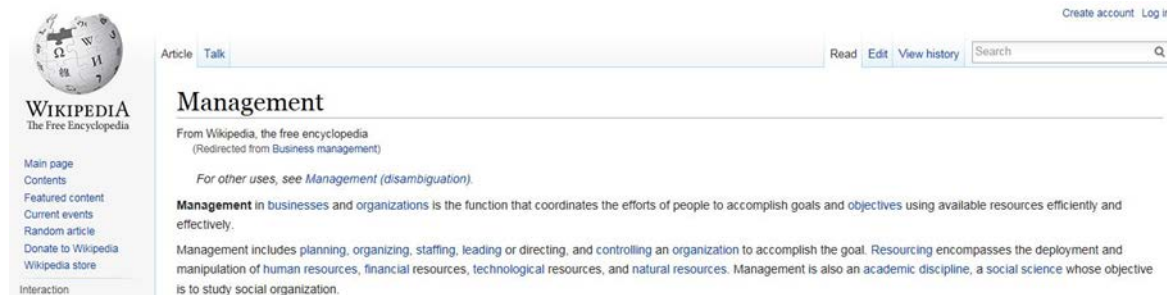


- An online search can help you get a feel for how much information is available on a topic, and may also identify sources you would not otherwise find.
- However, don't simply search for broad topics such as 'organisational behaviour' or 'management theories'. Most general search engines have millions of indexed pages which are not organized into any discernible order. This often leads to the returning of numerous records which may have nothing to do with your original search.
 - By searching on a short string of connected words you can reduce the number of hits to a more manageable and relevant list. You may need to refine the string a few times once you see what is being returned.



Wikipedia(!)

- Wikipedia is not a reliable source of academic information, primarily because there are no checks on the academic credibility of the material that is posted there.



- However, Wikipedia can be a useful source of further references, usually found at the bottom of the page. But again, be wary of the links validity.

References [edit]

1. [^] <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/113218?redirectedFrom=management#eid>
2. [^] SS Gulshan. *Management Principles and Practices by Lallan Prasad and SS Gulshan*. Excel Books India, pp. 6–. ISBN 978-93-5062-099-1.
3. [^] "Andreas Kaplan: European Management and European Business Schools: Insights from the History of Business Schools, *European Management Journal*, 2014".
4. [^] "Management". *Business Dictionary*. Retrieved 29 November 2012.
5. [^] *Administration industrielle et générale - prévoyance organization - commandment, coordination – contrôle*, Paris : Dunod, 1966
6. [^] *Vocational Business: Training, Developing and Motivating People* by Richard Barrett - Business & Economics - 2003. - Page 51
7. [^] Giddens, Anthony (1981). *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*. Social and Politic Theory from Polity Press 1. University of California Press. p. 125. ISBN 9780520044906. Retrieved 2013-12-29. "In the army barracks, and in the mass co-ordination of men on the battlefield (epitomised by the military innovations of Prince Maurice of Orange and Nassau in the sixteenth century) are to be found the prototype of the regimentation of the factory - as both Marx and Weber noted."
8. [^] [?] Gomez-Mejia, Luis R.; David B. Balkin and Robert L. Cardy (2008). *Management: People, Performance, Change, 3rd edition*. New York, New York USA: McGraw-Hill. p. 19. ISBN 978-0-07-302743-2.



Appropriate Online Academic Material

How do you tell when information you find on the internet is reliable?

- Before using information you find on the internet for assignments and research, it is important to judge its accuracy and to establish that the information comes from a reliable and appropriate source.
- A general web search on the internet will return a wide range of sources, not all of which are credible. A good way of testing the credibility of a source is to check the name of the author, to see if he or she has produced other academic work.



Appropriate Online Academic Material

- Furthermore, consider the following criteria and ask yourself the following questions:
 - **Audience**
 - Who is the website's intended audience? Academics? The general public? School children?
 - Does it appropriately address the target audience?
 - Is it relevant for your assignment or research?
 - **Authority**
 - Is the author identified? If the author has chosen to remain anonymous, ask yourself 'why?'
 - Is the author a person you recognise as an expert in their field?
 - If not, is there enough information provided to establish the author's credibility?
 - Are they qualified to write about the subject?
 - Can you find references to the author elsewhere?
 - Is the author affiliated to an academic institution or credible organisation?



Appropriate Online Academic Material

- Consider the following criteria and ask yourself the following questions:
 - **Accuracy**
 - Is the text free from spelling errors, well-written and grammatically correct?
 - Has the content been through an editing process or been peer reviewed?
 - Has the author included a bibliography or reference list?
 - Are the sources cited reliable and can they be verified elsewhere?
 - Are research methodologies adequately explained?
 - **Objectivity**
 - Does the author present objective arguments or make it clear when they are expressing biased opinions?
 - Are other points of view explored?
 - Is it a personal website? Does it express personal opinions?
 - Is the website part of a commercial organisation, a political party or an organisation with a specific agenda? If yes, question the motives for publishing the information.
 - Does the website promote a biased viewpoint?



Appropriate Online Academic Material

- Consider the following criteria and ask yourself the following questions:
 - **Currency**
 - Can you tell when the information was published?
 - Is the information up to date?
 - How frequently is the website updated?
 - Are the links up to date and working?
 - A good website will show when it was ‘last updated’ or give a clear indication of the timeliness of the information. Working links indicate the website is being maintained and updated regularly.
 - **The URL**
 - Look at the URL (web address) of the website. The domain name can help you establish if the information has been published by a credible source. For example:
 - **.ac.uk** domain is published by a UK University
 - **.edu** domain is published by an American University
 - **.gov.uk** domain is published by the UK government



Summary

- Inevitably, you will need to source additional information, alongside what your tutors direct you towards, when writing your assignments at an undergraduate level.
- Remember, If the sources that you use are not credible, it may compromise your works validity, as well as giving your tutor an indication of a lack of wider reading on your given subject.
- If you are unsure about a source you are using for your assignment, **always make sure that you check with your module tutor.**

