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Online Research Guide

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Students and researchers can take advantage of a plethora of databases available online. Before the internet existed, libraries were an essential part of the research process. Today, individuals can often complete research without visiting a library at all. Personal computers are now the primary tools for conducting academic research. The internet created new ways of accessing information, which changed the research process.

Internet research has advantages and disadvantages. Students can easily and quickly access information, often through free databases or memberships their school provides.

> THE INTERNET CREATED NEW WAYS OF ACCESSING INFORMATION, WHICH CHANGED THE RESEARCH

The amount of available material, however, can be overwhelming and may become a hindrance. Additionally, this wealth of information is not always from credible sources. This guide covers methods for conducting online research and provides tools to effectively organize information to easily cite sources. The guide also includes information specifically for learners conducting all types of public health research.

PROCESS.

USING GOOGLE FOR ONLINE RESEARCH

Because Google is the most commonly used search engine, it is the primary example in this section. Like most search engines, Google provides search filters that help users locate reliable sources that are relevant to their topic of interest. Refining the search criteria filters out unnecessary content, keeps the search focused, and helps users avoid information overload. Below are tools to save time and energy while using search engines.

Refining Your Search Results

Google provides a list of commonly used search refinements. To search for a specific website, include "site:" before the name of a website or domain. There should be no spaces between "site:" and the domain name that follows. For example, a user could search for "site:.gov" or "site:youtube.com." Add a keyword before the site search to find information about a specific topic within that domain. For example, searching "certification site:apha.org" would find information about public health certification on the official website for the American Public Health Association. Individuals can use the site function to search for a particular class of site, such as .edu, .gov, or .org.

Other search shortcuts can be useful to those conducting public health research, including hashtags and "exact match" searches. A search for a hashtag, such as "#publichealthinitiatives," locates instances of the exact hashtag across social media platforms and on other sites. When searching with the "exact match" tool, users type the exact word or phrase inside quotation marks.

Google also provides the advanced search tool, which does not employ the search shortcut text. Researchers can further refine their search results by using the "tools" button located under the search bar. Users can enter a custom time range for the publication date of results, which ensures their search includes only current sources and media.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar allows researchers to conduct broad online searches of scholarly documents. Users find information across academic disciplines from academic publishers, universities, publications from specialized scholarly societies, and websites that host primary sources. Google Scholar helps researchers sort through scholarly literature by offering "related works" searches and options to search by citations, authors, and publishing company.

This search engine works well when combined with a university library membership, which allows researchers to access the entire source, not only the title and author. Google Scholar also ranks the contents of its search results, considering the publisher, author, and how others cite the source. Additionally, researchers can create their own Google Scholar Preferences, which sync with their Google account profile. The preferences page allows users to specify the layout search results, manage citations, select language preferences, and link multiple library or university affiliations. To get the most out of Google Scholar searches, students should review the Scholarship Search Tips page.

BEYOND GOOGLE

Finding reliable resources is one of the first steps in conducting proper research. Learners can diversify the online tools they use to locate information. Apart from Google Scholar, several academic search engines exist. These different types of resources are often available to students for free or at a discounted rate. Below are commonly used resources for general academic research, including public health research.

General

- AMiner: This search engine provides searches of keywords, data, and user profiles. Search results include information from more than 6,000 academic conferences, 3.2 million publications, and 700,000 user profiles.
- The Catalog of U.S. Government Publications: Using the CGP, students can search historical and current federal publications using simple descriptive information. The CGP provides full documents when available, and users can obtain expert search assistance at nearby Federal depository libraries.
- CIA World Factbook: The World Factbook is a repository of information on characteristics of global locations, including the location's history, people, government, economy, and geography. Researchers working on internationally based projects can cross-reference information using the World Factbook.
- ERIC: All materials in this database, including journal articles, reports, and conference papers, must meet certain standards and criteria, making this a reliable, peer-reviewed resource.
- iSeek Education: iSeek provides editor-reviewed documents from universities, governments, and established noncommercial providers. This tool is useful for academics and for teachers searching for lesson plans and grade-appropriate instructional texts.
- National Archives: This engine allows users to search multiple National Archive resources simultaneously. Users can view and sometimes download digitized copies of records, images, and videos.
- OCLC: With more than 50 million records and digital resources from more than 2,000 contributors, this website is accessible through the WorldCar.org system. OCLC pioneered the creation of library-linked data technology and offers tools to help users organize sources during the research process.
- CORE: CORE harvests information from full-text content in open access journals and repositories. This information is free and open to the public. CORE also offers researchers an online forum to network, which fosters collaboration.

For Public Health Students

- PubMed: PubMed.gov is part of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health. Researchers use this database to search more than 28 million documents from MEDLINE, life science journals, and online books.

- Circumpolar Health Bibliographic Database: This extensive database is for individuals studying populations in the circumpolar regions. Researchers can search the system by illness, geographic area, and keyword.
- International Aging Research Portfolio: This independent organization fosters collaboration among researchers, healthcare policymakers, government officials, interest groups, and the general public. The online aging research directory offers a large number of academic resources in the natural, behavioral, and social sciences.
- WorldWideScience.org: This global science gateway provides national and international scientific databases and portals. Users have access to real-time searching and translation of globally dispersed, multilingual scientific literature.
- Social Science Research Network: This network provides access to hundreds of thousands of research papers from scholars across 30 disciplines. The user-friendly website sorts searches by fields of study.
- PubPsych: This efficient search engine helps users find health and psychology resources. Users can research more than 800,000 datasets in English, Spanish, French, and German.

EVALUATING SOURCES

With the rapidly growing number of resources available online, researchers must take extra care to ensure their sources are reliable. Misinformation is prevalent in part because almost anyone can publish information on the internet. When conducting research for public health school, students should consider the following questions to determine whether a source is credible. Researchers should know each work's author, purpose, and date of publication. The following tips were derived from lists provided by Georgetown University and the University of Chicago Press.

Who Is the Author?	Researchers should know the academic background of authors they cite. An author with a published work is not necessarily credible. Researchers should utilize the work of experts in their field whenever possible.

What Is Its Purpose?	Students must understand the purpose of a source to use it correctly. The motive of the author provides contextual evidence for whether the work was intended for a general audience or for experts. Researchers should use caution when citing works intended for a general audience, as these summaries can be too misleading or vague in academic scenarios, which require concise and accurate research.
Does It Look Professional?	Researchers can typically trust work that is published in peer-reviewed academic journals or by a known academic press. These publications have high standards for the quality of content they produce. Credible sources are often polished and free of spelling and grammatical errors, and they generally comprise clean and organized material with no profanity.
Is It Objective?	Sometimes academic sources have various purposes, and some can be helpful than others. Remember that even scholarly publications have a type of commentary or opinion-style category. These often come in the form of book reviews or are “in response to” someone published use of their work to which the cited author wishes to respond. Unless one is trying to show the different sides of an argument by way of these opinions, use the primary source whenever possible.
Is It Current?	An author’s work can be relevant for decades and even centuries. In many cases, however, researchers must respond to new data and publications in their field. Utilizing new scholarship

	indicates that a researcher is in tune with current trends and is working to advance research in their discipline. Current works typically include those created within the last five years.
What Sites Does It Link To?	Researchers should note a source's citations and sites to which it links. These clues help researchers understand what the author of the work considers to be credible sources. Be wary of works that cite suspicious sources.

ORGANIZING YOUR RESEARCH

Researchers have access to a variety of online and physical organizational tools, including hard copy filing cabinets, indexes, digital citation software, and online storage. Each researcher must find an effective method for their process. No approach is necessarily superior, as long as it helps the student maintain an organized and accessible body of research. Consider the following tips and online research management tools to find an effective system.

FIND A METHOD AND STAY WITH IT

Researchers may not have time to try several organizational techniques. As soon as you find one that works for you, especially concerning ease of use and accessibility, use the technique until it no longer serves your needs.

DETAILED FILENAMES AND FOLDERS

When storing information digitally, use descriptive names for files and folders. Labels should indicate the nature of the content, and a simple hard drive or cloud search should find them.

CHANGE NEW INFORMATION TO FIT YOUR SYSTEM

Content created by another researcher may include labels or information that does not fit your system. Take the time to change the metadata, rather than allowing someone else's preferences for research organizations impact your system.

COMBINE NOTES WITH SOURCES

When creating notes that belong with a particular source, whether in hard copy or digitally, append the notes to the original document. This method ensures that the documents stay together and makes the notes easier to access.

CREATE A BACKUP

Researchers should have more than one copy of their work, including the work itself, accompanying notes, supporting documentation, and citation information. Use an external hard drive or cloud space, or make multiple hard copies.

Online Tools to Manage Your Research

- EasyBib: This application helps researchers organize books by title or ISBN. Users can scan the barcode on a book to immediately generate a citation in more than 7,000 citation styles.
- Endnote: In addition to generating and keeping track of citations, Endnote includes team collaboration features. The program allows up to 100 people share a single reference library with documents and information.

- Mendeley: Researchers use this platform to read and organize files and sources. Mendeley also includes a research network that helps millions of researchers worldwide collaborate and share information.
- RefWorks: RefWorks provides researchers and libraries access to historical archives and current scholarship, plus organizational tools for saved resources and citations.
- Zotero: This user-friendly program helps researchers manage citations and notes across devices. Zotero is one of the only programs that automatically searches the web for related content and metadata as the user writes.

CITING ONLINE RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENTS

All academic research should follow the prescribed citation format for the field. Developed by the American Psychological Association, APA style is the most common citation format for research in social science disciplines, including public health. Public health students may also follow the AMA general format and citation rules, depending on their institution's preferences.

Using a consistent citation style for works in a given field creates clear expectations for documenting and presenting cited sources. Adhering to these expectations help scholars produce documents that are easy for other researchers to interpret. Consistent documentation of sources increases the likelihood that an author receives credit for their work. Additionally, researchers are more likely to keep an organized portfolio of sources, and to use them correctly, if they follow their field's preferred citation style.

APA STYLE

The examples below demonstrate correct APA style citation formats. Consider visiting the Purdue Online Writing Lab for additional information and examples.

Articles From Online Periodicals

A digital object identifier (DOI) is a type of numeric and alphanumeric labeling system most often used to identify academic, professional, and government documents, such as research reports, data, and journal articles. The DOI appears as two-part number and decimal system with a forward slash between the numbers: "10.1985/143." Researchers should use the format that appears on the document they wish to cite. Students should use a DOI in their citation unless no DOI is assigned to the original text.

With DOI

Format:

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article. *Title of Journal, volume number*, page range.

doi:0000000/000000000000 or http://doi.org/10.0000/0000

Example:

Brownlie, D. (2007). Toward effective poster presentations: An annotated bibliography. *European Journal of Marketing, 41*,

1245-1283. doi:10.1108/03090560710821161

Without DOI

Format:

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article. *Title of Journal, volume number*. Retrieved from

http://www.journalhomepage.com/full/url/

Example:

Kenneth, I. A. (2000). A Buddhist response to the nature of human rights. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics, 8*. Retrieved from

http://www.cac.psu.edu/jbe/twocont.html

Newspaper Articles

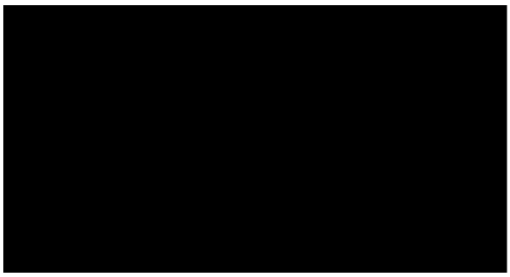
Format:

Author, A. A. (Year, Month Day). Title of article. *Title of Newspaper*. Retrieved from

http://www.someaddress.com/full/url/

Example:

Parker-Pope, T. (2008, May 6). Psychiatry handbook linked to drug industry. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from



Electronic Books

Format:

De Huff, E. W. (n.d.). *Taytay's tales: Traditional Pueblo Indian tales*. Retrieved from

http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/dehuff/taytay/taytay.html

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Example:

Davis, J. (n.d.). *Familiar birdsongs of the Northwest*. Available from http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?

inkey=1-9780931686108-0

AMA STYLE

AMA style, developed by the American Medical Association, is a citation system widely used in biomedicine, medicine, dentistry, biology, and some social sciences. The examples of AMA styles below are from the Arizona Health Sciences Library and USciences.

No Author Name Provided

Format:

Name of organization. Title of specific item cited. URL. Accessed date.

Example:

International Society for Infectious Diseases. ProMED-mail Website. http://www.promedmail.org. Accessed April 29, 2004.

Author Name Provided

Format:

Author A. Title. Name of website. URL. Updated date. Accessed date.

Example:

Sullivan D. Major search engines and directories. SearchEngineWatch Website. http://www.searchenginewatch.com/links/article.php/2156221. Updated April 28, 2004. Accessed December 6, 2005.

Online Journal Article With Six or Fewer Authors; DOI Included

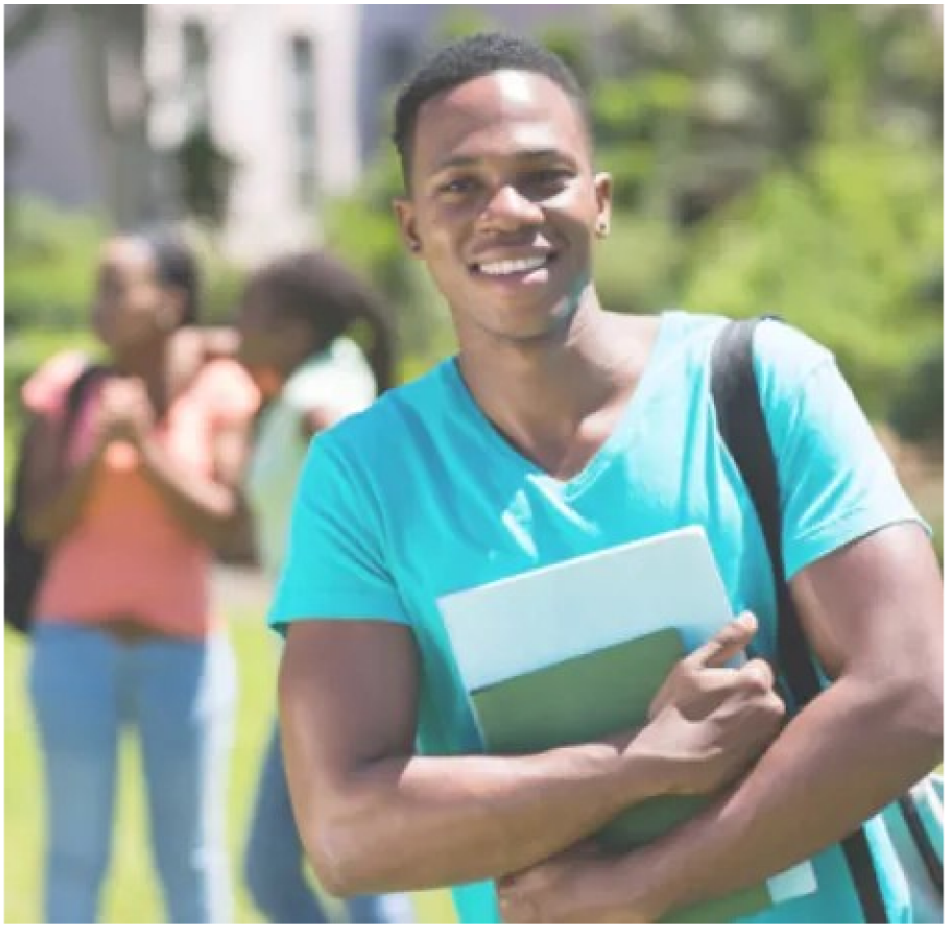
Example:

Florez H, Martinez R, Chakra W, Strickman-Stein M, Levis S. Outdoor exercise reduces the risk of hypovitaminosis D in the obese. *J Steroid Biochem Mol Bio*. 2007;103(3-5):679-681. doi:10.1016 /j.jsbmb.2006.12.032.

Online Journal Article With Six or More Authors; DOI Not Included

Example:

Siris ES, Miller PD, Barrett-Connor E, et al. Identification and fracture outcomes of undiagnosed low bone mineral density in postmenopausal women: results from the National Osteoporosis Risk Assessment. *JAMA*. 2001;286(22):2815-2822. http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/22 /2815. Accessed April 4, 2007.



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