

Monica Gribben

The Study Skills Toolkit for
Students
with **Dyslexia**



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5 Gathering Information



This chapter looks at the processes involved in gathering information from the library and online resources. It takes you through the searching, finding and using stages of effectively sourcing what you need for your assignments, and tells you how to avoid plagiarism. 

Searching

Finding

Using

Your gathering information toolkit

Lightning ideas

Searching

But I've got my lecture notes.
I thought I'd just use them;
surely that should be enough?

Are you kidding me? Write an
entire assignment from a few
lecture notes? Are you serious?

How many of us started out thinking that's how it all worked? Then realisation dawned – we needed to learn to use the library ... What!? Library!? That place full of books and print!? That place where the letter–number system is so complicated we never seem to find what we're looking for and so ... exit the library from our student life?

Is that such a wise thing? Of course, there will always be students who'll never use the library, but how successful are they really as students? It's true, you'll already know something about your assignment topic from lectures and notes, but you'll always need to know more. So ask yourself – am I here to scrape a pass or am I here to understand my subject so that eventually I can enter the working world as a confident, knowledgeable professional? What's it to be?

It's true, libraries can be difficult to use but they're not impossible to manage. Even accessing online resources can sometimes be hard but still manageable. So instead of dreading the searching and the surfing in the hope you get it right, why not join forces with fellow students, share responsibilities and make this part of your assignment interesting, exciting, even intriguing (see Chapter 1). Don't forget, some like online surfing, while others prefer hard-copy searching. So play to your strengths and see what all this information gives you. Oh, and brainstorm – what do you need to know to make your search run smoother? Job shared! Does searching and surfing seem too much like hard work now or too scary a thought? Right, let's make a start!

By taking time at the start of your course to learn your library's systems and procedures, and online and search engine processes, you'll save time and energy later on. Know your subject section, bookmark your favourites and learn how to search effectively.

Learn how to search

Different assignments require different types of searches. So identify the scope and type of information you need. Is it books, journals, newspapers, online, audio-visual? Is it historical or current? Is it scientific, legal, governmental, general theory, practitioner-related? Is it key to your discussion or for background information? Generally, you'll have a reading list but if you don't then search using key concepts, subjects, topics, words to find what you need. Remember, save your search for future reference!

- catalogue – simple search, advanced search, electronic searches, search engines
- catalogue system:



Activity 5.1 Library treasure hunt

From opening times to inter-library loan procedures, make learning about your library fun by allocating tasks in your group. Record key information in your W.Cube-It (Chapter 1): one section – one issue.

What's your library's ...

opening hours catalogue referencing system search engine system limit on the number of borrowing items photocopying regulations individual or group study room booking system	
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Find out ...

How long can I borrow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standard loan books • short loan books • reserve section books • inter-library loans 	How do I borrow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inter-library loans • inter-campus library loans • audio-visual materials • electronic or digital copies
How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reserve books • renew books • get extended loan periods as a reasonable adjustment • resource accessible materials 	How do I use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reference sections • journals • special collections • digital resources • maps

Now hunt for these:

- 1 medical dictionary
- 2 legislation on the use of mobile phones while driving
- 3 a book from your course you need to borrow through an inter-library loan
- 4 two articles on virtual e-learning environments
- 5 self-issue machines (and find out how they work)
- 6 the title of Diana Ridley's academic book.

In your W.Cube-It, jot down where you found them and the sources you used to search. Now write a few sentences on how this activity made you feel or helped you. Share it with your group.

- books: numbers = subject; letters = beginning of author's surname
- journals: numbers = subject; letters = beginning of journal title
- journals – name, year of publication, volume number, article title, abstract
- your subject section:
 - standard loan, short loan, reserve, reference, special collections
 - media collections, electronic information, digital resources
- national library catalogue system.

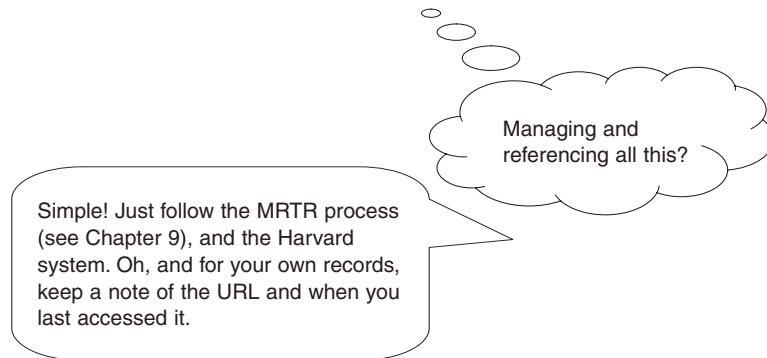
Your online search

Finding information online has become the norm for many students. Many courses encourage the use of online reading materials. Searching locally or remotely, at home or worldwide, accessing online materials has its advantages and disadvantages.

Table 5.1 Advantages and disadvantages of online material

Advantages	<p>You can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● access the most up-to-date, 'hot off the press' research ● access when and where it suits you ● change the font size and background colour so you can read and print articles to suit your needs ● have control over the material and search engines you use ● store search engines in your bookmark favourites ● see an overview of what's available on your topic ● evaluate whether a text is relevant to your topic ● gather, store, reference and share information using online referencing tools ● access information at the same time as others without being restricted by a loan period encountered in borrowing hard-copy texts.
Disadvantages	<p>You can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● easily cut and paste, and so are more open to plagiarise ● restrict your reading to online materials only and miss an important hard-copy text ● inaccurately cite a reference.

Want to optimise your bookmarked search and access academic works worldwide? Then add Google Scholar, Google Books and iTunes-U to your course's recommended search engines and databases. If your university subscribes to electronic resources then you're sure to find what you need. If not, then try an inter-library loan. Not quite enough? Then widen your search using online search engines.



A referencing example

Leeds Metropolitan University: Skills for Learning (2009) Quote, Unquote: A guide to Harvard referencing [Internet], Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University. Available from http://skillsforlearning.leedsmet.ac.uk/Quote_Unquote.pdf [Accessed 1 March 2011].

Finding

OK, I've managed to learn the system but how do I actually find what I really need?

Table 5.2 Scanning

What you're doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking for a word or a phrase related to your topic; rapidly searching through library catalogues, search engines and printed information • scanning over then skimming to make sure it's what you need.
How you do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • search the library catalogues to find materials related to your assignment topic • scan the contents and index pages looking for relevant chapters and themes • place Study Buddies bookmarks in the relevant pages • cross-reference, making a note of all the pages that contain the same themes – easier to locate for more detailed, close reading • list pages and their related topics • use a fresh page for each topic and the YOP code for your references (YOP code: Yellow = book; Orange = journal; Purple = online resources).

To help you get a kick-start on personalising your surfing and searching system, why not read over Chapter 1 and take it from there. Want to keep track of your searches and what you've found so you can share it with your group? Then use the online Zotero or EndNote. First though, you'll need to learn how to scan and skim for information. Not sure how? Confused? Need some practice?

Table 5.3 Skimming

What you're doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quickly casting your eye over key words and phrases related to the topic, generally missing out the small in-between words • getting a general sense of the issue being discussed so you'll know it's exactly what you need.
How you do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • record the topics and references you need for your assignment • use Study Buddies bookmarks to identify information in texts • read information relating to one single topic at a time, and skim read, searching for phrases or concepts that relate to the topic • use shaped stickies to make a note of these • to discuss different viewpoints in your assignment by using <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mapping Man One – the 'for' viewpoints ○ Mapping Man Two – the 'against' viewpoints.

Let your Mapping Man organise your thoughts, group information and references, and help you decide what to use and what to discard.

Using

How many of us thought we were great students because we were sitting in a library? How many of us were actually studying? Were we using the information we'd just found or simply trying to look good? Finding information is one thing but knowing how to use it effectively is another. So how do you use what you read so you can confidently produce work worthy of your knowledge? Learn your detailed and close reading processes, (see Tables 5.4 and 5.5), use your MRTR process (Chapter 9) and make use of text-to-speech software to aid your understanding.

Avoiding plagiarism

Avoiding plagiarism isn't easy and is something every student grapples with but it's something you need to be aware of, from gathering information through to writing up.

Table 5.4 Detailed reading

What you're doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading each word at normal speed • understanding and considering what your reading is all about; its main message • not making notes at this stage – simply reading, considering and evaluating its relevance for your assignment.
How you do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work through the topics one at a time to consider the relevance of it for your assignment • make a fresh Mapping Man and colour-code the various topics using a different shape of the man for each one • colour-code the references and match them against the shaped and coloured topic <p>Now using index cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write your reason for using each particular reference – where does it fit in your discussion? • put the coloured shape of the topic it belongs to at the top of the card • put all the information that belongs together in a plastic wallet in your assignment folder.

Table 5.5 Close reading

What you're doing	Involves all of the above – scanning, skimming, detailed reading plus reading more closely, so you can take notes for your assignment.
How you do it	<p>All of the above strategies plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a Mapping Man or list to make notes of the information you intend to use • practise summarising what you've read • add your own thoughts and ideas, and chunk information according to its topic. <p>Create a Mapping Man picture of your discussion to make writing up easier:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a large Mapping Man for a bigger picture of the assignment topic • use a smaller Mapping Man for the arguments, thoughts and ideas associated with the bigger picture • use the same shapes and colours for the same viewpoints • record all references accurately to avoid plagiarism • remember that you don't have to agree with everything you read. If you disagree then make a note of it and say why • be confident about your agreements and disagreements, and what you're writing.

So always:

- check and follow your university's guidelines on plagiarism to avoid its consequences
- follow the MRTR process
- run your work through Turnitin.

But what if it can only be said in that way?

We've all come across views and ideas where we feel there's simply no other or better way to say things. It can only be said in that way – succinctly and to the point. If that's the case then don't waste time trying to rewrite the un-rewritable; simply acknowledge the source and reference it accurately.

But what if I like the way the author says it?

Equally, don't become complacent and fill your work with endless quotes that fail to demonstrate your understanding. Just because you like the way something is written doesn't mean to say it's stating exactly what you're trying to say. After all, you'll have read it, thought about it, agreed or disagreed, and evaluated its place in your discussion, so you'll need to demonstrate your understanding in the quality of your academic writing and debate. Show you know your stuff!

But what if I find it hard using my own words?

Of course, it's hard using your own words, even learning to write academically; it's not something you can do overnight. It all takes practice and confidence! The more you practise, the more confident you'll become. Watch your own writing style develop. How often have we all looked back at assignments and said 'Who on earth wrote that? Was that really me?' That's a sign of development!

But what if I don't have time to rewrite things in my own words?

Don't make lack of time your excuse. Manage your time and you manage your writing. It's all too easy to fall into the 'no time – panic – copy and paste' trap of plagiarism, collusion or thesaurus overload, but what have you really learned?

Table 5.6 Plagiarism, collusion and thesaurus overload

Plagiarism	copying exactly what the author has written without acknowledging it
Collusion	cutting and pasting content, words or ideas from another student's work to create your response
Thesaurus overload	randomly replacing several key words from others' work to make it appear different and often without knowing exactly what they mean

Remember, your tutor will soon learn your writing style so don't take cutting and pasting short cuts that have consequences. To avoid the obvious:

- 1 Accurately reference all sources and use Turnitin.
- 2 Discuss ideas with others but don't show them your work.
- 3 Use word prediction tools and listen to the options so you understand the meaning.



Activity 5.2 Summarise and paraphrase

Work with a friend to test your summarising and paraphrasing skills:

- summarise this chapter
- paraphrase one section each.

But how do I know when to stop gathering information?

If you feel your assignment question can be adequately answered, then trust your instinct and know that you've gathered enough information. Remember, you can't put everything you read into your assignment, even if it seems remotely relevant. So stop reading and making notes, and confidently start writing.

Your gathering information toolkit

Gathering information can be made easy by searching, finding and using tools in this toolkit.

The visual learner's gathering information toolkit

From sourcing to using what you've gathered, these tools should give you the picture memory you need to recall the processes involved when dealing with information.



- Endnote
- Evernote
- Highlighters
- Mapping Man
- Sticky text highlighter strips
- Turnitin
- W.Cube-It
- YOP code
- Zotero

The auditory learner's gathering information toolkit

Feel you'll refine your surfing and searching skills by hearing what's involved? Then this toolkit is ideal for you.



- Android
- ClaroRead
- Dragon
- Flashcards
- Highlighters
- Index cards
- Librarian
- Livescribe Echo Pen
- Quote, Unquote pdf
- Read & Write
- Sticky notes
- Sticky text highlighter strips
- Student mentor
- Study Buddy

The tactile learner's gathering information toolkit

See it, hear it, do it ...it sticks! If this is how you learn best, then working with this toolkit will support your learning style.



- Academic poster
- Floorsize Mapping Man
- Google Scholar, Google Books
- Highlighters
- Index cards
- iQ Mobile Search
- Library group
- Smartsheet
- Sticky notes

Lightning ideas

Practise:

- oral summaries using a recording device
 - oral summaries with a friend
 - written summaries; have a friend read and verify these
 - summarising the assignment question
 - summarising main points of text
 - paraphrasing text
-
- secure your photocopied pages
 - accurately reference the source at the top of each photocopied or printed page
 - don't highlight information in library books or journals
 - record references accurately
 - accurately attribute citations to the exact source
 - where possible, rewrite quotes in your own words
 - be confident about writing in your own words
-
- bookmark search engines and references as favourites
 - use Zotero, Evernote or Endnote
 - use Turnitin
 - form a library group – share information



Learn to search, search to learn



Please go to the Companion Website for this book www.sagepub.co.uk/gribben to access downloadable resources, all the activities featured here and a podcast for this chapter.