

Once you've picked a topic, what will be your first step in finding information?

The first thing that researchers at all levels tend to do when dealing with the topic that they may not yet know much about, is to Google it. When you're searching online, everything comes at you fast. Tweets, scholarly reports, blog posts, articles from news magazines, video clips, and images... It can be difficult to know what sources tend to be best for college-level research. Plus, most assignments will ask you to examine a topic in more depth than internet texts alone can help you to do.

Doing some basic internet searching at the start is useful. It can help you to gather background information, learn the specific terminology, people, or dates related to your subject, and provide you with important contextual information. To go deeper and to get more detailed content on this topic, turn to the library resources. General reference works in the library collection can also help you to quickly orient yourself to a topic.

Another type of source that you may wish to consult, are newspapers. Newspapers cover current events, local news, commentaries, and opinion pieces. Newspaper articles provide brief and summarized information and can be searched using certain library databases. If your topic deals with current events newspapers are a very good choice.

Scholarly journals are important for researchers because they represent the main way that scholars talk to one another and share ideas. These journals are published in different issues throughout the year. The articles from these scholarly journals are often some of the best sources that you will use for your English 110 papers.

Books can also be excellent sources since they cover a topic in depth. However, they take a lot longer to publish - sometimes several years - so the information within them may not be as current as the information published within articles.

As you research, give some thought to what audience the source is trying to talk to. In general, resources can be either meant for everybody or they can be meant for a scholarly audience. Newspapers are a good example of a popular resource. They are written in an easy-to-understand style for the general public, rather than just for experts in a certain field. They also contain lots of advertising and usually focus upon current events. Journalists, not scholars, provide the content of the articles.

Scholarly resources, such as articles found in scholarly journals, go through an extensive review process and report on research rather than current events. One way that you can tell you are looking at a scholarly resource is if the writer - usually an expert on the subject - includes an extensive bibliography or list of resources at the end of the article.

When navigating all of this and choosing which types of these resources you might want to consult for your paper, it can be helpful to talk to a librarian or to talk to your instructor. They can help you to think about where you're most likely to find the best information, which will often depend on the topic you choose, and what it is about that topic that interests you.