



## Guidelines for Keeping a Research Journal or Log

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### A. Research Journal Guidelines

"A research log helps you track the *what, where, when*, and even, the *how* of your research process. It will prevent you from repeating searches and will also help you keep track of the language and jargon unique to the disciplines you most often search. Keeping a log engages your physical, mental, intuitive and intellectual processes. It also offers you a ritual—a way in which research is performed mentally and physically. In this sense, the log becomes more than your memory, it becomes a part of the way in which you seek" (Pedersen). Basically, the journal is a place to record how you are conducting research for your topic. The research journal guidelines provide a structure for recording information. These guidelines only address the basics; however, you may include any other resources or strategies that you used.

#### A) List your topic and keywords or concepts that describe the topic.

#### B) Search and specify subscription reference databases and browse through reference books on the topic.

- Online reference databases may include *Literature Resource Center*, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*
- Search the Library Catalog by subject, e.g. Literature -- Dictionaries to find *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia*, and more
- Is there one source that provides a helpful overview and background on your topic? If so, list it in your journal how you found it and explain why it will be useful for your research. Also indicate sources you examined that do not seem to be helpful and explain why.

#### C) Find books in the general collection.

- Search the Library Catalog to find books. List all terms, keywords or subject headings that you used in your searching. Be sure to note the terms or searches that yielded the most results.
- Find the books on the shelves and select any that you think will be most useful. List the title(s) and call number(s) in your journal.
- Set up a free netLibrary account for yourself, so you can access
- Search WorldCat ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)) to find relevant books at other libraries. A WorldCat application is available to be added to your Facebook profile.

#### D) Find journal articles.

- From the library home page click on "Databases Listed by Subject." Databases to search include *Literature Resource Center*, *MLA International Bibliography*, *Academic Search Complete*, *Project MUSE*, and *JSTOR*.
- In your journal list all the terms searched, and your search strategy. For example, "I searched the *MLA International Bibliography* database. I limited my search to items that include full text articles and typed **modernism** to find information about modernism in American literature." Which terms or search strategies yielded the best results?
- Look at subject terms applied to relevant articles. Did you find additional articles by searching these subject headings?

- List bibliographic information for several articles that you might want to use for your research. Be sure to list the titles of any other databases you used in searching.
- Set up a free MyEBSCOhost account for yourself. You can save articles and searches through this service and set up alerts so that you are notified when new issues of selected journals or new items meeting your saved search criteria appear in the database.
- Become familiar with the InterLibrary Loan service for items at other libraries.

#### E) Find web resources.

- Search the web for useful sites. Which search tool(s) did you use (Google, Google Scholar, Yahoo, etc.)? Which search terms did you use?
- Utilize free web research services such as iGoogle, delicious, zotero, etc. Which services did you use and how did you use them?
- If you found a citation to a book or book chapter, did you search WorldCat to see if St. Mary's or other libraries have this book?
- If you found a citation to a periodical article, did you search for the periodical title using the **Locating Journals** link on the library homepage to see if St. Mary's has this periodical?
- List your search terms and phrases. Cite the best web sites in the journal and tell why they will be useful for your topic.

#### F) Cite your sources using MLA format.

##### **Information Seeking Process**

- Think about your question.
  - Break it into key concepts and identify terms for each concept. Start with fewer words.
  - Think about which individuals or groups of people or organizations are associated with your topic. These might be additional terms to search.
  - Consider what type of information you need and where you might find it.
  - Use Boolean connectors like **and**, **or**, and **not** to connect keywords. Many databases search the words as a phrase otherwise.
  - Truncation characters such as an \* (asterisk) can expand your search by retrieving various forms of a word, e.g., *comput\** retrieves *computer*, *computers*, *computing*, *computation*, etc.

Please feel free to talk to the librarians. That's why we're here.

##### **Objectives:**

- *Be able to find library resources that you might include in one of your projects*
- *Be able to generate appropriate keywords and related terms for topic*
- *Become more familiar with some of the library's databases and the type of information they provide*
- *Feel comfortable asking a reference librarian for assistance with your research questions*

##### **Vocabulary:**

*Academic Search Complete*  
 Boolean connector  
 descriptor  
*Gale Virtual Reference Library*  
 Google Scholar  
 iGoogle  
 InterLibrary Loan  
 journal  
*JSTOR*  
 library catalog  
*Literature Resource Center*

*MLA International Bibliography*  
 My EBSCOhost  
 netLibrary  
 periodical  
*Project MUSE*  
 subject heading  
 subscription databases  
 truncation  
 WorldCat

Adapted from White-Carter, Anita. "Information Literacy Assignment: Keeping a Research Journal." Updated 27 Sept. 2007. Information Literacy Web, Ramsey Library, UNC-Asheville. 17 Sept. 2008 <[http://bullpup.lib.unca.edu/library/infolit/as\\_resjour.html](http://bullpup.lib.unca.edu/library/infolit/as_resjour.html)>.

Quote from Pedersen, Sarah. "How to Keep and Use a Research Log." Revised Fall 2004. Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA. 17 Sept. 2008 <[http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/mit2007/fall2005/fall\\_handouts/assignments/technology/ResearchLog.doc](http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/mit2007/fall2005/fall_handouts/assignments/technology/ResearchLog.doc)>