

# School of Psychology

## Developing a search strategy

You have just received your first assignment and ask yourself the question ‘**Where do I start?**’ You need to think through the steps needed to complete the assignment. This is your search strategy. A **search strategy** is a methodical approach to searching for information on a topic.

Following are some suggested steps to get you started. These can be developed or modified depending on the assignment.

### Getting Started – what does it mean – what am I looking for?

- Be sure you know what your lecturer requires - Ask questions.
- Use subject dictionaries to define terms or encyclopedias to obtain an overview of your topic. These reference sources may also provide alternative **keywords** that can be used when searching library catalogues and online journal databases.

Some useful examples of **subject specific** encyclopedias and dictionaries are:

#### Dictionaries

Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. (2001)	150.03 REB	JOO
Dictionary of Developmental Psychology (1996)	R155.03 STU	JOO
Dictionary of Personality and Social Psychology(1986)	R302.03 DIC	CHU,JOO,MTL

#### Encyclopedias

Concise Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.abr.(1998)	R150.3 CON	JOO
Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology & Behavioral Science	R150.3 COR	JOO
The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology (1995)	R302.03 BLA	JOO
Comprehensive Clinical Psychology (1998)	R616.89 COM	JOO

- How much information required will depend on the requirements of the assignment or research project. For example, an assignment essay requiring 3,000 words is going to require you to collect a lot more information than one requiring only 1,000 words.

### Next step - what type of material am I looking for?

#### Start with a book.

- For an **historical overview**: Books take longer to publish than journals and generally provide a more in-depth view of a topic.
- Psychology students have access to over 800 books online through PsycBOOKS. Individual book titles can also be accessed via the library catalogue.
- +A useful place to begin any assignment is with the reading list included with your unit outline. This reading list will generally include citations to books, journal articles and possibly reports and videos.
- If the book you want is on loan then use the REQUEST option to recall it. The library cannot hold one book per person and recall is used to assist with demand.

Books can be located using the library catalogue –

Search using a keyword such as attachment; child development; STROOP

Examples:

attachment and theory

child development and learning

STROOP and effect

**The ECU Library catalogue** tells you which items are held by the ECU Library in print or online formats, with links to electronic holdings. For physical items it tells you in which campus and collection

the item is held, the call number and status for all books, journals, videos, sound recordings and computer software.

- The catalogue is menu driven and is searchable by author, title, subject, keywords and call number.
- The 'Login to My Library profile' menu option allows you to access your borrower information and renew loans.
- **Limit search options** – allows you to limit search results to specific criteria, eg year of publication, additional words, campus location or material type (book/video). A sort by date option available from the limit page will display your results with the most current items first.

## Library Collection Arrangement

Library items are arranged on the shelf using the Dewey Decimal Classification, which is broadly subject based. In addition, the Library collection is divided into smaller collections. For example –

- Print Serials (Journal) collection with an 'S' prefix to the shelf number.
- Reference collection (a not for loan referral collection) with an 'R' prefix to the number.
- Reserve collection (high demand items for use in the library) with no prefix to the number but a collection name and separate location.
- Electronic holdings of books and journals are accessed directly from the library catalogue.

## When looking for current information – use journal articles

For **current** trends or information on a very specific topic, **journal** articles may be the most useful, as they are generally published on a regular basis. They can also provide information for those occasions when all the books are on loan.

## Library Subject Index Databases - Finding a Journal Article


There is a high expectation that students use the journal literature when researching for an assignment. Journal articles generally contain specific and more up to date information than that found in books.

- The easiest way to locate journal articles on your topic is to use a relevant subject index. Searching a subject index provides you with a list of citations on your topic, sometimes an abstract (a short summary of the article) and sometimes the full text of the article.
- These days, most subject indexes are electronic and referred to as databases.
- When you are searching in a subject index database and there is no full text of the article available then you need to check the **journal title** in the ECU Library catalogue to see whether it is held. You will need to bear in mind that the library will not hold all of the journals indexed, however, from the Library catalogue you will be able to check if other university libraries hold the title.

Electronic databases specific to Psychology can be located from the Databases by Subject link from the Online Databases link on the Library Homepage. The major Electronic Database is PsycINFO but PsycARTICLES is also a very useful source of full text articles for psychology.

In using any journal index or databases, you will need to bear in mind that the Library will hold some but not all of the journals covered. However, from the Library catalogue you will be able to check if other university libraries hold the required journals. You can search the collections of other University libraries via the ECU Library Homepage using the link Other Catalogues.

Many electronic databases provide full text articles. You can select a database and search by topic for relevant articles or you can browse issues of the online journal. If the article is available full text online you will be able to download and /or print or email the article directly. This is also an excellent means of retaining the reference details of each article used in your assignment. Where the database doesn't offer

fulltext, using the  button may direct you to the fulltext item via another database that the ECU Library subscribes to or via library catalogues.

**Access:** A range of online databases are available through ECU Library Online and can be accessed on campus or from home. Details on off campus access are available <http://www.ecu.edu.au/library/system/indoor-connect.html>

Access within the library or on campus you will require an ADS login. This can be set up using the SIMO <http://www.ecu.edu.au/apps/SIMO/logininfo.htm> or checking with the Student Central staff.

**Search strategy:** Any subject database search depends on identifying appropriate **keywords** to use as search terms. These terms should describe each concept in the topic. They can then be searched individually or linked using Boolean operators such as-

- **AND** to narrow a search
- **OR** to broaden a search.

## **Psychology examples**

**Topic:** Describe the developmental characteristics for **ONE** of the following life stages; infancy, early childhood, middle childhood or adolescence with particular attention to integration of physical, cognitive, language, social and personality development.

**Identify the main concepts:** Development, life stage, infancy, adolescence, cognitive and physical. Think of some additional terms which may apply – learning and development, language and early childhood, cognition, nature or nurture.

**Select some appropriate information sources.**

### **PsycINFO**

This is the most comprehensive database covering Psychology and related areas. Coverage is from 1887 onwards and provides abstracts from journal articles, book chapters, reports and dissertations. A small number of full text articles are provided. International focus.

### **PsycARTICLES**

This database provides full text articles on current issues in psychology from respected sources. PsycArticles includes more than 39,000 full-text articles from 53 journals published by the American Psychological Association and allied organizations. All journals included in this Database are indexed in PsycInfo.

### **PsycBOOKS**

PsycBOOKS is a fulltext database of more than 13,000 chapters in PDF from over 800 books published by APA and other distinguished publishers. It also includes 100 out-of-print books, an additional 70+ classic books of landmark historical impact in psychology and entries from the Encyclopedia of Psychology.

### **ProQuest Social Science Journals**

Covering many of the main journals in the Social Sciences with some in full text.

### **Academic Research Library (Proquest)**

An interdisciplinary database covering some core psychology journals with some full text coverage.

### **Meditext (AMI plus full text)**

Australian database, coverage includes all aspects of health and medicine, with an emphasis on clinical medicine and paraprofessional fields.

### **Current Contents(ISI)**

Indexes and abstracts articles from the world's leading scholarly research journals in all disciplines, with good coverage of science areas.

## Expanded Academic ASAP

A huge international multidisciplinary database with a user-friendly interface: incorporates a significant proportion of full text articles. A good starting point for searches with some useful Psychology journals covered in fulltext.

## The Search strategy

Use the following search strings in each of the databases listed until you have enough information.

Infant and stages and develop?  
Child development and cognition  
Language and child?

**\*Tip** Not all these search statements will provide a result in each database. Search terms can be searched individually. Round brackets must be included around the OR operation when done in a string with AND.

**\*Tip** The above examples use truncation i.e. the ? picks up any words with letters after develop, such as *ment* and *mental*. Check the database help screens for the symbol used in the specific database.

**\*Tip** For more explanation on developing a search strategy and using subject index databases to find journal articles, please refer to the *Liberty: Learning to find information* module: **Finding journal articles using a subject index** available from ECU Library Online <http://www.ecu.edu.au/library/liberty/index.html>.

## Referencing

For each assignment or report you will be expected to reference all quotes used as well as any ideas not your own. Not doing so is called **plagiarism**, which is considered serious academic misconduct.

For this purpose **it is very important to note down the full referencing details of the works you are using**. It is not an easy task to retrace your steps and find the citation again.

The details for the works you use and reference within the text of the assignment will need to be compiled into a reference list or bibliography and attached to the end of your assignment.

ECU follows the American Psychological Association style of referencing. For a summary and examples of how to format your references, use:

- The ECU Referencing Guide available from the ECU Bookshop or from ECU Library Online - <http://www.ecu.edu.au/LDS/pdf/refguide.pdf>
- The Publication Manual of the APA Shelf number: 808.06615 PUB

APA Electronic referencing site <http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html>

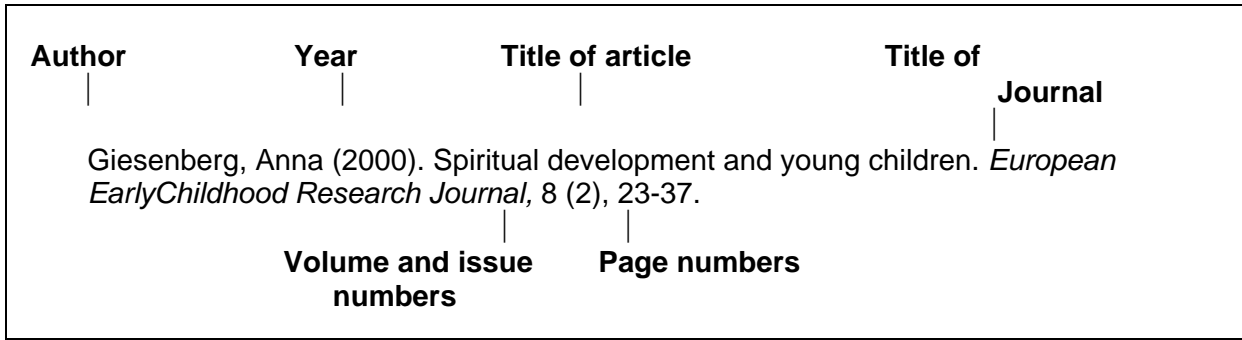
## Recognising parts of a reference

The following examples show the formatting and details you will need to provide in your Reference list or bibliography.

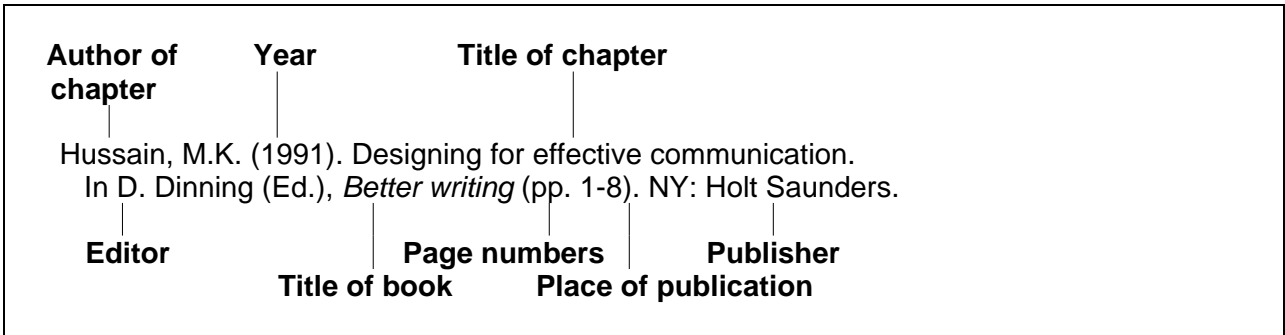
### Book:

Author	Year	Title	Place of Publication	Publisher
Thompson, Neil	(2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.)	(2002). <i>People Skills</i>	Basingstoke:	Macmillan.

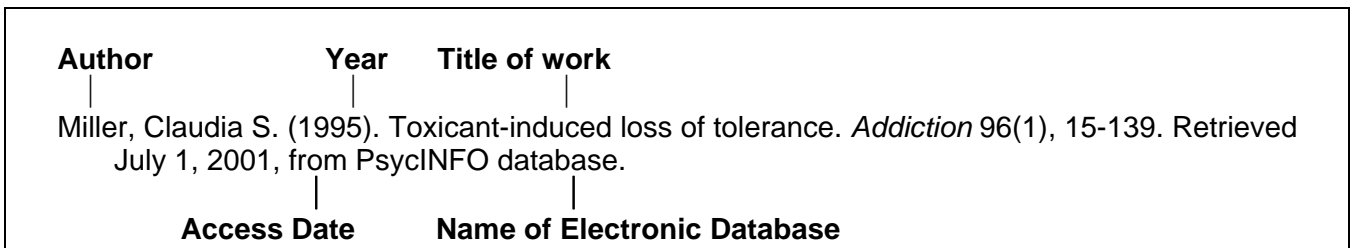
### Journal article:



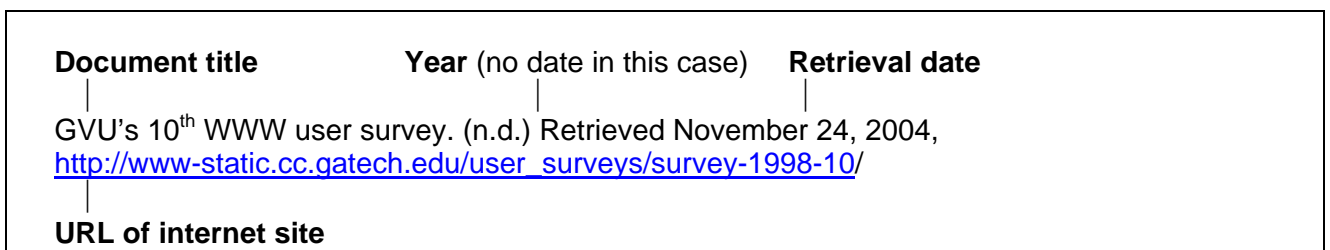
**Book chapter:**



**Article from an electronic subject index (database)**



**Internet site:**



**Checklist**

- Your unit outline is often a good place to start as it lists a reading list for the unit and the expected learning outcomes. Ask your lecturer for a copy.
- Pick up a library bookmark for your subject area whilst in the library, it will list useful call numbers to use when browsing the collection.
- Rostered reference librarians can assist with your research/assignment needs.
- To learn about the following areas use the Web self-paced library information skills program ***Liberty: Learning to find information*** available from ECU Library Online -
  - Introducing your Library Service
  - Developing your assignment topic
  - Finding journal articles using a subject index
  - Searching the World Wide Web
- Familiarise yourself with services on **ECU Library Online** - <http://www.ecu.edu.au/library/>
  - The ECU Library catalogue for locating items accessible in the ECU Library, requesting items from another campus or on loan to somebody else and renewing your books on loan using your library profile option.
  - “ASK US” – An email service to request assistance from a librarian about using the library to locate information for your research/assignment.
  - “FEEDBACK” for general feedback on library services.
  - Faculty Library Resources for Computing, Health and Science can be a useful place to begin searching the Web as here are listed some key databases, selected websites and guides for your subject area <http://www.ecu.edu.au/library/faculty/fac-chs.html>
  - ECU Referencing Guide and Online Referencing formats
- Familiarise yourself with the Student Portal which includes courseware for some units, access to MyECU, and getting started with IT. <http://www.ecu.edu.au/student/homepage/>
- Contacts to the Faculty Learning Advisers and a group of Study Skills modules covering the following topics <http://www.ecu.edu.au/student/student-learning/#chs>
  - Getting started on Assignment writing
  - Note-making (Reading effectively)
  - Exam preparation
  - Referencing
  - Time management
- Remember to bring your Student ID card each time you wish to borrow.
- Printing or photocopying within the library requires your Student ID card or CopyPlus card
- The new Student ID card (Introduction starts 2007) incorporates both Automatic library borrowing functionality and storage of printing/photocopying credits so there is no longer any need to buy a separate CopyPlus card
- **Access to other libraries:** Edith Cowan University has negotiated agreements with the libraries of the other WA Universities for you to be able to register as a borrower for the duration of the academic year by presenting to the chosen library, your Student ID card and proof of enrolment (first time only). The ECU library catalogue provides an option to Search other Library Catalogues.

## **Research Planner – Developing a Search Strategy**

### **Why do you need to plan your research?**

- Planning keeps you focused
- Planning helps you decide on the types of information to be used
- Planning helps you to decide where to look for that information

### **Developing a Search Strategy**

#### **1. Analyse your topic –**

##### **What have I been asked to do?**

- Know what you are looking for
- If you were to find the perfect article, what information would it contain?
- Define unknown terms

##### **What types of material do I need?**

- Current – Journal articles may be the most useful
- Consult encyclopedias or books for background information
- Statistics
- Websites – Useful for government or institutional information

##### **What level of information is required?**

- You may be asked to use ‘scholarly’ information and need to limit searches to refereed or peer reviewed journals
- You may be asked to provide research evidence or news articles

##### **How much information is required?**

- A major assignment worth more marks and requiring more words often requires more supporting information
- Has the assignment noted a requirement i.e. Find 5 journal articles

#### **2. Find information using one of the following sources-**

- ECU Library catalogue – to check for ECU Library holdings of all types of materials including books, videos, DVDs, journals and electronic materials
- Subject databases – to locate journal articles on a topic
- Internet – remember to check credibility of the author/website

#### **3. Check out the information collected**

- Is the information credible and relevant to the topic?
- Have I got enough relevant information?
- Does the information cover all the elements of the question?

#### **4. Produce the report/Write the essay**

- Presentation – use an appropriate format
- Credit your sources of information - remember do not plagiarise
- Referencing – Use the ECU Referencing guide for the correct format