Library Helpsheet
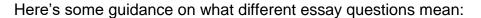
Research Skills

What is research?
Research at school usually means **finding information** for an essay, project or assessment. Research is also called data collection or information retrieval. The ability to gather and use information is very important to your studies, if you want to go on to college or university, and is a transferable skill for the workplace.

What information do you need?

Look at the essay question or title of the assessment and decide what you need to research. The **length** of the essay will also tell you how much detail you need to find – a 500-word essay will need a lot less information than a 2, 000 word essay. The length of **time** you have until hand in will also indicate how much research you have time to do. If you have only a week before hand in, then don't spend too long researching – just a few hours.

Here's some guidance on what different essay questions mean:

Instruction	What you are expected to do
Criticise	Judge a piece of text like a poem, novel, story, passage, or statement – using points for and against
Describe	Give a description of a topic so that the reader understands the topic and your opinion of that topic
Discuss	Write about all aspects of the question, with different points of view
Evaluate	Balance the evidence for and against, and conclude with your opinion
Illustrate	Include a diagram or an example to answer the question
Outline	Include the main points only – what, where, when, how, why and who

How can I find the information I need?

Mind mapping is a good place to start to see what you already know about a subject, identify gaps, and see what you need to research. It will also let you see which **keywords** you can use for your searching to find relevant pieces of information.

Your mind map will also help you identify possible sources of information – books, magazines, eBooks, internet.

Use the **Library catalogue** to find books available in the School Library and other North Ayrshire libraries.

Evaluation

Evaluating the information you have found is very important – **assess** its validity. Remember, just because it is published doesn't mean it is true! This is especially true of the information found on the internet. Always **think** before using information.

Use the following to **evaluate** whether a resource is relevant for your research:

  ➢ Use the **contents** page of a book or magazine, or the **menu** on a website, to see what the resource is about. Often a book or magazine provides a summary of each chapter/article. Menus in websites often have a list of topics. If the topics listed are not what you are looking for, then move onto the next resource.
  ➢ Use the **index** to find specific keywords in a book. The index is an alphabetical listing of the key terms used in the book and a page number indicates where the term appears in the text. If the keyword you have in mind does not appear in the index, then move on to the next resource.
  ➢ Use **Find** on the internet to search for a keyword on a page (in the **Edit** menu in Internet Explorer in **options** in Google Chrome) to search for a keyword and each occurrence of the keyword will be highlighted. If the keyword you have in mind does not appear in the index, then move on to the next website.

  Use the following for evaluating the information you have found:

  ➢ Is the information what you **expected** to find? If not, check with other sources – if it is the same, you have found out something new!
  ➢ Is the information **accurate**?
  ➢ Is the information the **same** in different sources? (more likely to be accurate)
  ➢ Is the information **current** (up to date)? (although historical information may be what you need if you are looking at the development of an issue/topic)
  ➢ Is the information **opinion or fact**?
  ➢ Is the author likely to be **biased** for any reason?
  ➢ Is the information from a **primary** (where first published and contains original information) or **secondary** source (published in another source; not where it was first published, and where the information may have been altered)?

Remember to keep a **note of the sources** you use for your research as you go along. Information sources you use for research should be listed in a **bibliography** (a list of the books, magazines, websites, etc. you used for research – See the **Bibliography Helpsheet** for more details) at the end of your essay/assessment. It is a good idea to have an open Word document when you are searching online.

That way you can copy and paste the URL into the document and make a note of the information from the website which you found useful.

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