

SELECTING INFORMATION SOURCES FOR ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH WORK

Guiding Questions

- What are Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Information Sources?
- What are their various applications in the Academic Research Process?
- Where can you find these Sources?

Primary Sources:

Definition: Direct evidence or first-hand accounts of events, experiments, people, or works of art.

Examples:

- Historical documents: Diaries, speeches, letters.
- Scientific reports: Original research articles, lab notebooks, clinical trials.
- Creative works: Novels, paintings, music compositions.
- Data sets: Census data, raw survey data.

Secondary Sources:

Definition: Interpretations, analyses, or syntheses of primary sources, usually providing a second-hand perspective.

Examples:

- Scholarly books and articles that interpret or review research findings.
- Biographies that explore individuals' lives based on primary texts.
- Documentaries that provide commentary on historical events.
- Reviews that evaluate the significance of original works or research.

Tertiary Sources:

Definition: Collections, summaries, or condensed versions of materials, often compiling information from primary and secondary sources.

Examples:

- Encyclopedias that provide overviews of topics by synthesizing findings.
- Textbooks that survey a topic's main ideas and information.

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- Dictionaries and glossaries that offer definitions and explanations.
- Indexes and bibliographies that list primary and secondary sources.

REFERENCE SOURCES EXPLAINED

Reference sources are key tools in the initial stages of academic research, offering concise and factual information to inform and guide more detailed investigations. Here are examples of reference sources and their specific applicability during the academic research process:

Reference Sources and their Applicability in the Academic Research Process

Dictionaries:

- General Example: Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.
- Specific Example: Dictionary of Computing.

Applicability: Useful for understanding the precise meaning, pronunciation, and origin of words. In academic research, they help clarify technical or subject-specific terminology, ensuring accurate usage.

Encyclopedias:

- General Example: Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Specific Example: Encyclopedia of Environmental Science.

Applicability: Provide general overviews of a wide range of topics, helping to establish a foundational understanding of a subject. They are particularly useful at the start of research to gain background information.

Thesauri:

- General Example: Roget's Thesaurus.
- Specific Example: Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary.

Applicability: Aid in finding synonyms and antonyms, enhancing academic writing by diversifying vocabulary and avoiding repetitive language.

Almanacs:

- General Example: The World Almanac and Book of Facts.
- Specific Example: The Old Farmer's Almanac.

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Applicability: Provide up-to-date factual information and statistics, useful for adding current data or contextual information to research.

Atlases and Maps:

- General Example: Times Atlas of the World.
- Specific Example: Atlas of World History.

Applicability: Supply geographical data and historical maps, aiding in the study of physical spaces, historical geography, and demographic trends.

Statistical Databases:

- General Example: Statistical Abstract of the United States.
- Specific Example: World Development Indicators (World Bank).

Applicability: Offer comprehensive and current statistical information, crucial for supporting research arguments with empirical data.

Bibliographies:

- General Example: MLA International Bibliography.
- Specific Example: Bibliography of African American Literature.

Applicability: List sources on specific subjects, helping researchers identify relevant books, articles, and papers for detailed investigation.

Handbooks and Manuals:

- General Example: Chicago Manual of Style.
- Specific Example: Handbook of Chemistry and Physics.

Applicability: Provide guidelines on formatting, research methodologies, and specific technical data, ensuring research is conducted and presented according to academic standards.

Directories:

- General Example: Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).
- Specific Example: Medical Directory.

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Applicability: List contact information for organizations, experts, and institutions, facilitating networking and collaboration in specific fields of study.

By utilizing these reference sources effectively, academic researchers can ensure their work is well-founded, accurate, and comprehensive, paving the way for deeper investigation and analysis.

INDEXES AND ABSTRACTS IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Indexes and abstracts are invaluable reference tools in academic research, guiding researchers to relevant journal articles, papers, and other scholarly content. Here's a look at general and specific examples and their applicability in the academic research process:

General Indexes:

Example: Web of Science

Specifics: A comprehensive research platform hosting multidisciplinary content from high-impact journals worldwide, covering sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Applicability: Web of Science is used extensively in academic research to identify scholarly articles across various disciplines, track citations, and explore research trends. It's particularly beneficial for interdisciplinary research where insights from multiple fields are valuable.

Specific Indexes:

Example: Scopus

Specifics: While Scopus covers a wide range of subjects, it is particularly recognized for its extensive coverage in scientific, technical, medical, and social sciences literature.

Applicability: Scopus is used for literature reviews, bibliometric analysis, and to track the impact of research in specific fields, especially in sciences and social sciences. It's also useful for identifying collaborations and academic networks.

Subject-Specific Indexes:

(Biological Sciences): Biological Abstracts



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Specifics: Focuses exclusively on life sciences literature, covering topics from botany to microbiology to pharmacology.

Applicability: Biological Abstracts is crucial for researchers needing comprehensive, focused coverage of the life sciences. It aids in discovering relevant articles, experimental findings, and reviews in specific biological research areas.

(Humanities): MLA International Bibliography

Specifics: Specializes in literature, language, linguistics, and folklore, offering citations and summaries for books, articles, and dissertations.

Applicability: Essential for scholars in humanities, particularly those focusing on literary studies, language, and cultural analysis. It helps locate critical resources, theoretical works, and primary texts.

(Engineering): IEEE Xplore

Specifics: Provides access to technical literature in electrical engineering, computer science, and electronics.

Applicability: IEEE Xplore is indispensable for researchers and professionals seeking the latest in engineering and technology, offering access to conference papers, standards, journals, and other technical content.

(Business and Economics): ABI/INFORM

Specifics: A leading source of business and economic literature, featuring journals, dissertations, and market reports.

Applicability: Used by academics and professionals in business and economics for accessing up-to-date research, case studies, and analyses of global economic trends.

Using indexes in academic research facilitates the discovery of relevant, peer-reviewed, and up-to-date scholarly articles, aiding in the development of literature reviews, formulation of research hypotheses, and understanding of the current state of research in specific fields. They are essential tools for ensuring the depth and breadth of academic investigations.

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PUBLICATION FORMATS IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Information is published in a variety of formats. It is important that you are aware of the range of formats available to you and know how to select and use those appropriate for various academic and research tasks.

- **Books and Monographs:** Comprehensive coverage of a topic, providing depth and context. Example: "The Oxford Handbook of Psychology".
- **Journal Articles:** Focused studies or analyses typically presenting original research or reviews, published in scholarly journals.
- **Conference Proceedings:** Collections of papers or presentations from academic conferences, often containing cutting-edge research.
- **Theses and Dissertations:** Detailed research projects required for completing a degree, presenting original research.
- **Government Documents:** Reports, bills, statutes, and other documents issued by local, state, or federal governments.
- **Electronic Resources:** Digital formats like e-books, online journals, and databases providing access to a vast range of materials.

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING INFORMATION SOURCES

When selecting information sources for your academic tasks, consider the following:

- **Relevance:** The source should pertain directly to your topic or research question.
- **Authority:** Evaluate the source's author or origin to ensure credibility and reliability.
- **Currency:** Select up-to-date sources, especially for subjects that evolve quickly.
- **Purpose:** Understand the reason behind the creation of the source – educational, commercial, or entertainment.
- **Scope:** Determine the depth and breadth covered, ensuring it aligns with your research needs.

MANAGING INFORMATION SOURCES IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Information source management tools, also known as reference management software or citation managers, are essential in organizing and handling references, bibliographies, and academic materials during the research process. Here are a few notable ones, along with examples and their applicability:

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Zotero:

Example: A free, open-source tool that helps you collect, organize, cite, and share research sources.

Applicability: Particularly useful for individual researchers and academic students for managing various sources, creating bibliographies in different styles, and organizing research materials with tags and collections. Zotero also facilitates collaboration through shared libraries.

Mendeley:

Example: A free tool that also offers a premium version; it combines a desktop application with a website, allowing users to manage, share, and discover content and contacts in research.

Applicability: Used for academic writing and research, Mendeley helps manage and annotate PDFs, generate citations and bibliographies in various styles, and network with other researchers. It is beneficial for both individual and collaborative research projects.

EndNote:

Example: A comprehensive commercial reference management software used to manage bibliographies and references while writing essays and articles.

Applicability: Widely used in large-scale research projects and academic writing. EndNote supports a vast number of citation styles and offers powerful organization and collaboration features, making it suitable for professional researchers and institutions.

RefWorks:

Example: A web-based bibliography and database manager that allows users to create personal databases by importing references from text files or online databases.

Applicability: RefWorks is often used by academic institutions to enable students and researchers to create individual or shared databases, format bibliographies, and insert citations into papers, supporting a variety of referencing styles.

Where can you find these Information Sources?

Visit www.aamusted.edu.gh/library

Select [Research Databases A-Z](#) if you are using the Campus Wifi or

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When you are off-campus [Off-Campus Access \(RemoteX\)](#) (request for login credentials)

Or contact your Faculty Librarian or send a email to library@amusted.edu.gh to request for assistance in finding your desired information source.

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