

### Third lecture

Course book: *Research Writing Simplified* by Raymond H. Clines & Elizabeth R. Cobb

Dear students,

Finding sources for your research paper requires a lot of effort. You need to be careful in deciding which sources are of use and support to the topic you have chosen, and your ideas and argument about the topic. Sources may be available in print or on line. The computer and modern technology, largely, facilitate this process. Yet, students have to be careful with the huge amount of books and articles suggested, because not all of them may be relevant. Again, I am going to concentrate on certain passages taken from your course book. You need to read these passages very carefully.

First chapter: The Research Process – Using Computer Resources.

### **Computer Resources**

Research has undergone vast changes in recent years, largely because of computer technology and the Internet. A great deal of information that was previously available only in books, periodicals, or newspapers is now available online through databases or the World Wide Web. Just a few years ago most research needed to be conducted in libraries, but that is not the case today. The ability to navigate the complexity of computer information is becoming an essential skill for everyone, because of its relevance to all areas of life. Computers have the ability to sort through information for you, locating exactly what is relevant to your specific interests and making research much faster and easier.

We have three means for computer resources: databases, the internet, and keyword searches.

## I- Databases

Electronic databases collect and index information available in print, and these electronic collections can be immense. Databases are either portable or online.

- 1- Portable databases are similar to books in that they can be purchased and carried around. Compact discs with powerful storage capacities (CD-ROMs) are the most common type of portable databases.
- 2- Online databases are usually stored in large computers and made available through a type of subscription service. Information in these databases can be updated continually.

In addition to listing titles and authors, both on line and portable databases give abstracts or summaries of articles, making it much easier to determine if a work is helpful for your research.

The advantage of using a computer database is obvious if you compare it to the commonly used print index, the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, which (a) indexes fewer than two hundred magazines, (b) does not provide abstracts of the articles, and (c) is bound in yearly volumes. A database, on the other hand, can access information contained in many print indexes going back several years. Also by using keywords you can conduct a search in many ways, broadening and narrowing the search and thoroughly exploring all possible resources.

Computer databases are powerful research tools, but they do have some limitations. Regardless of how sophisticated the computer databases may be, it is still important to be familiar with the print resources.

- Disciplines such as literature, history, and philosophy depend heavily on material written decades and even centuries ago. Research that requires information going back many years will probably have to be conducted through printed materials because database indexes tend to include only more recent information.
- In-depth research may involve little-known journals and local sources that are omitted from general database indexes and are available only in print.
- Another limitation to computers is the lack of uniformity among systems, while print reference material will be the same in all libraries.

## II- The Internet

The Internet must be seen as one of the most significant technological advances of our time and, like other major inventions – it is reshaping our entire society. However, it was not until the 1990s, with the creation of the World Wide Web, that the Internet became practical for colleges, businesses, and individuals to use. Currently, the Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks both large and small. Small networks, like those in universities, have their own systems. Large networks, such as World Wide Web, Telnet, e-mail and Usenet are distinct online worlds in themselves. However, because each network has agreed to use the same protocols for communication, a vast “net” of interconnected computer systems has been created. The result is an electronic information and communication system that no one owns but to which anyone with a computer and modem can contribute.

We access web pages through software programs called “web browsers” such as America Online, Netscape Navigator, or Microsoft Internet Explorer. By entering the web address or URL (Uniform

Resource Locator) of a document, we can locate the web site. Virtual libraries are a good place to begin a general search on the Internet, especially if you have not narrowed down the topic. If you do not have specific URLs, you can use search engines such as *Yahoo!*, *Netscape Navigator*, which are especially helpful if you do not have a clear topic.

For academic research, the best search engines are those that have been reviewed by librarians such as the *Librarian's Index to the Internet* or *Alpha-Search*. Library-reviewed search engines allow you to move directly to more credible sites, avoiding the step of sorting through the less reliable sources in a large index such as *Yahoo!*

### III- Keyword Searches

Without appropriate keywords, you may have limited success finding relevant articles. Keep in mind that a particular topic can be identified by many different words or terms, and gaining some familiarity with them can make your research more efficient and focused. Experienced researchers rely on the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* index. Identifying the correct keywords, and focusing your topic can save many hours of random research – you can also find keywords by consulting the index of either an online or print encyclopedia.

You may notice that when you begin reading information from a particular site, certain words or phrases will be highlighted or underlined in a different color. These are “hot spots,” which provide links to related topics when you click on them and can be another way to identify keywords and related terms.

Because anyone can set up an information site on the internet, evaluating sources is especially important. Obviously, sources such as the *New York Times Online* or *National Geographic Online* will be as credible as their print counterparts of scholarly journals. However,

some Internet sites will be of little value because they are maintained by individuals, organizations, or businesses that have definite biases. At present, the Internet is not nearly as reliable as print sources or databases because printed information is usually edited or reviewed by authorities in the field prior to publishing. Here are some points to consider in determining the reliability of Internet sources:

- Authority: who is the author? What qualifications are provided? Unless the individual or organization is identified, the source should not be used.
- Accuracy: are the facts accurate? Is there an editor or peer review process? Are there links to known authorities? Is the information primary or secondary? (that is, is the information coming firsthand from the person who did the research or is it someone reporting on another's research?) The further away from primary sources you get, the less reliable the source becomes.
- Objectivity: does the author have a bias or a personal grind? Is the site associated with an educational institution as a research tool for academics (if so, ".edu" will appear in the address), or is it merely a web page? If the site is sponsored by a commercial business (.com) or an organization (.org), it should be evaluated for possible bias since it could be nothing more than a form of advertising or promotion. Government sites (.gov) are generally reliable.
- Timeliness: has the site been updated recently?

That will be all for our third lecture. Needless to remind you that you must read the above passages very carefully and attempt to comprehend the content thoroughly.

Thank you.