

Know How Research Skills: Starting Research – Using Reference Sources Tutorial Transcript

Introduction

Slide 1: Welcome to the Know How Research Skills tutorial on reference sources.

There will be two short quizzes that you must successfully complete to get credit for this tutorial. When you are done, you will be able to print out a certificate or email your professor that you have done this.

Your work will not be saved so you must complete this all at one time.

Slide 2: This tutorial will show you what reference sources are, why they are useful when starting your research, and how you access them here at ACC.

Part I

Slide 1: Part 1: Reference Sources. What are reference sources and what are they used for?

You've probably used a reference source before, like Wikipedia on the web. Well, the stuff we'll show you here is more or less the same idea, just more reliable and consistent, but just as easy to use.

First, let's meet some ACC students who are just starting their research.

Slide 2: First, let's meet Willie. Willie just got an assignment in his Spanish class to write a short research paper on Chihuahua. He loves Chihuahuas! Thinking this will be a breeze, he goes to Google and types in 'Chihuahua' and he gets over 30 million results! He just uses the first few links and gets lots of information on these little furry friends.

He turns in his paper and gets an F! If he had looked a little bit farther down his hit list or used a more reliable reference source, he would have learned that Chihuahua is also a state in Mexico.

Slide 3: Betty has to give a speech on volcanoes for her Geology class. She doesn't know a lot about volcanoes but she does know she has to include articles from scientific journals in her research, so she starts there.

The first couple of articles she finds are "Uca marionis Mud Volcanoes: A Unique Ichnological Tool From the Bay of Bengal Coast of India for Ready Assessment of Beach Stability" from the journal *Marine Georesources & Geotechnology* and the second article is "Radiant Flux from Earth's Subaerially Erupting Volcanoes" from the *Journal of Remote Sensing*.

When she tries to read these, she's so discouraged she drops the class.

Slide 4: Doris has a research paper for her Sociology class on Cognitive Consistency Theories. She isn't clear on what this is so...

Slide 5: She goes to the Encyclopedia of Sociology. She searches the index and finds the page number for the article on Cognitive Consistency Theories.

Slide 6: There are about five pages on the topic. After reading the encyclopedia article, Doris learns that there are many subcategories of Cognitive Consistency theories and decides that it would be much easier to focus her five page paper on one of these subcategories, such as Cognitive Dissonance Theory.

She writes down some of the key thinkers in this subject and looks over the bibliography of sources at the end of the article. There's a book listed that explains Cognitive Dissonance in more detail. She checks the library catalog and it is available.

Slide 7: Doris' paper gets an A!

So what can we learn from Willie, Betty, and Doris? That it's a good idea to start a research project by looking at reference sources.

Slide 8: When I say 'reference sources' I mean sources like encyclopedias, almanacs, dictionaries, atlases and so on. These are called reference sources because you refer to them; you don't necessarily read them from cover to cover.

Slide 9: They summarize the basic areas of a topic and often include statistics, formulas, short biographies or important events.

Slide 10: They rarely push a point of view, although they may summarize major controversies within a topic. In other words, they'll provide an overall, balanced background so you will understand the big picture.

They are not the place to go to for the latest news on a topic. For that you usually want articles from periodicals or websites.

In other words, they provide an overview of a topic that can point your research in the right direction.

Slide 11: They are especially helpful if you have a general topic that you need to narrow into something more specific for a research paper.

Slide 12: Let's go back to Betty's project on volcanoes. If you look at an encyclopedia article in AccessScience – an online science encyclopedia that the ACC Library subscribes to – you'll see that there are different kinds of volcanoes, you'll see what materials they're made of, some famous volcanoes and the destruction they've caused.

Slide 13: With this information you can figure out a more specific and manageable topic. It will be a lot easier to understand than an advanced journal article.

So the lesson here is unless you have a research topic you are already pretty familiar with, it's going to make things easier if you get background information from a reference source at the start.

Slide 14: Here's a short quiz to check if you understand the types of information you can find in reference sources.

Part II

Slide 1: Part II: Accessing and using reference sources.

Reference sources come in both print and online formats.

Slide 2: In most libraries, including ACC, there is a separate area for print reference books. This is usually near where the librarian sits. The librarians are very familiar with the reference collection, so it's a good idea to ask them for assistance in picking out a reference source, whether it's print or online.

The print reference sources are for use in the library, so when you find something good in these, you'll need to either take notes on it or photocopy it. The good news is you can always rely on it being there since it can't be checked out.

Slide 3: But increasingly, reference sources are available online.

Slide 4: The ACC Library subscribes to several excellent ones that provide high quality information that is often missing from the web. These sources have gone through much more quality control than the typical web source, but have all the convenience of being online.

You can access them from any computer with internet access. If you're off campus, you'll get in by using your ACCeID.

Slide 5: Here's how you find them: from the library homepage – which is library.austincc.edu – click on Articles & Research, then from the expanded menu, click on Articles & More.

Slide 6: This will take you to our electronic resources page. You will see three choices: the alphabetical list, a list of general subjects, and an “all purpose” choice.

If you know the name of the resource you want, click on the letter of its name.

Or if you have a topic but don't know which resource you want, click on the subject that matches your topic.

The “all purpose” list has resources that are broad enough to be useful for almost any topic. This is where a lot of the good reference sources are listed, so let's start there.

Slide 7: These resources are a mix of databases that have reference information and those that have articles from periodicals like magazines and journals and some that have both. The one-sentence description below the title should let you know which type it is.

The ACC Library gets about 100 online databases, so we can only look at a couple of them here, just to show you the variety.

Let's start with Gale Virtual Reference Library.

Slide 8: Gale Virtual Reference Library is a general reference material which means that it is not specific to any subject or topic. However, it is a collection of over 200 separate subject encyclopedias, so you get a big variety of sources in one spot. It's a great place to start research.

Let's say your topic for a short research paper is alternative energy. You don't really know a lot about it, but you do know it is kind of a big topic and needs to be narrowed down

Slide 9: Entering the term 'alternative energy' gets over 90 results from a variety of sources, such as the Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics; the Environmental Encyclopedia; and the

Encyclopedia of Global Warming and Climate Change. So you have lots of choices from lots of sources.

Let's look at the one with the title "Alternative Energy Overview." That sounds like a good place to start.

Slide 10: Here you'll find a couple of pages that explain what alternative energy sources are and why they are important. And you will get some basic statistics and some of the major pros and cons for each type of alternative energy.

After reading over this, you might decide that hydroelectricity is a good way to narrow your topic. If you look back up at the top of the article, you can find links to related topics from this article. Here is a link for hydroelectric power. You can click on the link given there and search the Gale Virtual Reference Library for that specific topic.

Slide 11: Here is an encyclopedia article specifically about hydroelectric power. Let's take a look at that.

Slide 12: Again, here is an overview of hydroelectric power with basic facts and statistics on that topic.

This resource gives you the option to print the article, you can email it to yourself, you can translate it into another language, or you can even have the article read aloud. In other words, you have lots of options to get the information that you need.

Slide 13: So Gale Virtual Reference Library is a good general reference source for almost any topic. But let's take a quick look at a more specialized reference database.

So again, we'll start at the library's homepage and click on Articles & Research. From the expanded menu, we'll click on Articles & More.

Slide 14: Recognize this page? Right, it's the library's electronic resources page, but this time we are going to look at AccessScience.

AccessScience is an online science encyclopedia. It works much like Gale Virtual Reference Library but it is subject specific.

To get to AccessScience, you can click on either the letter A from the alphabet or on Sciences from the subject list. Let's do that.

Slide 15: This link will take you to a list of our specialized science databases. From this list we can select AccessScience.

Slide 16: From the homepage, enter your search terms. Let's recreate Betty's search from before on volcanoes. Your results list should give you a choice of encyclopedia articles, research updates, and recent news. Just click on the encyclopedia link to view the article.

Slide 17: These are just a few of the online reference sources ACC has to offer, but there are many more to choose from. Next time you need to narrow a topic or you have no idea what a glass armonica is, try exploring our website.

Slide 18: And by the way, a glass armonica is a "musical instrument consisting of graduated, tuned glass bowls sounded by the friction of wetted fingers on their rims. It was invented by Benjamin

Franklin.” At least that’s what I found in the Encyclopedia Britannica Online, another ACC database.

Slide 19: Remember, to get access to these resources you must go through the library’s website from the Articles & More page. The library pays for access to these resources, so not just anyone can search them, so you’re special.

Slide 20: But why use these library resources when you can just search the internet or Wikipedia?

The important thing to remember is that these sources from the library are much more reliable than just searching the web using Google or Yahoo, because they come from authoritative sources. This means that the articles in library resources are usually written by authors who are experts in their fields.

Slide 21: As you probably know, Wikipedia is written by essentially anyone who wants to. Sometimes this leads to great articles and sometimes to dumb ones. That’s one of the main problems with Wikipedia; it is very inconsistent.

For almost any article, if you look at the ‘history’ screen you’ll see how often the article has been edited. This is its second big problem. The information comes and goes so you can’t count on it being there when you want it, and since you don’t know who is writing it, you can’t be sure of its accuracy.

Slide 22: Wikipedia is good for very current topics or ones that academic sources probably aren’t going to cover, but usually you can find something more reliable for most topics using the library’s sources.

But it’s not really about one resource being better than the other; it’s about some resources being more appropriate for certain tasks.

Slide 23: Library materials are more appropriate for college-level research than general websites like Wikipedia because they are created for a college-level audience and they have a higher standard for authority, credibility and accuracy. And more important, library materials are the resources that your instructors expect you to use!

Slide 24: This concludes Part II: Accessing and Using Reference Sources. Now it’s time for your final short quiz. If you complete this successfully, you will be able to email your instructor and print out a certificate of completion.