**Finding Background Information Tutorial**

**Objectives:**

In this tutorial you will learn:

* The importance of background information for research
* Different sources of background information
* How to find background information

**1. What is Background Information?**

**Introduction**

Let’s say that you are looking for a new car. You might want to know which models are available and which cars are:

* Safest
* Affordable
* Fastest 0-60 MPH
* Most reliable

**Whom Do You Ask?**

Information about cars like models, ratings on reliability, and price are all background information.

Where would you go to find this information?

Student 1: Google it!

Student 2: Ask a librarian!

Student 3: Ask friends or family!

-Student 2 is correct! - Ask a librarian.

**Foundation of Facts**Background information is a great place to start your research.

Whether you are looking for a new car or working on a research paper, you need to find out:

* Facts
* Issues
* Names
* Dates
* Statistics

This foundation of information helps you to build your argument or make your decisions.

**Problems with Sources**

However when you are working on a research paper, you can’t always use the same sources you would use when looking for a new car.

* Friends or family may be mistaken
* Websites may have incorrect information

**2. Finding Background Information**

**So where do you find background information?**

Most libraries have a print collection of background information called the *Reference Collection*.

A librarian can help you identify which reference books will provide you with the background information you need for your topic.

Did You Know?
Books in library reference collections generally have to be used in the library because of their large sizes and value as sources for many people.

**Don’t have time to visit a library?**
There is a wide selection of online background sources available on the ACC library website.

Let’s look at how to access a couple of the most useful and popular background resources.

* CQ Researcher
* Gale eBooks

**3. CQ Researcher**

**CQ Researcher**
is a reference publication that has very up to date information on important political and social issues.

CQ Researcher is a great choice when you are writing a pro/con or argumentative paper. For example, if you search the CQ Researcher database for “Food Safety”, you will find pro and con essays by experts.

How do you find CQ Researcher on the library website and perform a sample search?

* Go to the ACC Library home page <http://library.austincc.edu>
* Select A-Z List of Databases
* Choose “C” from the alphabet list
* Scroll to your database in the alphabetical list
* Click “CQ Researcher”
* If you’re off-campus you’ll be prompted to enter your **ACC eID and Password** after clicking the link
* After you are logged in, you can either **browse topics** or conduct a search.

Here is an example search for “self-driving cars”.

* Type self-driving cars into the search box and then hit Search
* Review Your Results

You may see many background reports that relate to your topic.

Pay close attention to the date. Some reports may be too old or out of date to support your research.

To read any article, choose either HTML or PDF.

There is also a Pro/Con section. Clicking “Pro/Con” in the menu on the left will show pro and con essays side by side on the screen.

Each Pro/Con page includes short essays by experts on either side of the question.

**4. Gale eBooks (formerly Gale Virtual Reference Library)**

**Gale eBooks** searches many subject-specific encyclopedias, handbooks, guides, and other reference books at the same time.

Use Gale eBooks to find many different perspectives on a single topic.

For Example:
If you search “Abortion” you get articles from:

* The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology
* The Encyclopedia of Science and Religion
* The Encyclopedia of Civil Rights in America

As may probably guess, the topic of abortion is addressed very differently in these 3 encyclopedias.

Gale eBooks is another database. You will find it following almost the same steps listed for CQ Researcher from the ACC Library home page <http://library.austincc.edu>

* Click “A-Z List of Databases”
* Choose “G” from the alphabet list
* Scroll down to find Gale eBooks

**Gale eBooks:**You can conduct keyword searches across all subject areas included in the database.

Here is an example search:

* Type “Medical Marijuana”
* Click the Search button

You may have many choices from a variety of subject encyclopedias.

When choosing an article, pay close attention to the source.

Some may not be relevant to your research focus. For example, if you are researching the legal use of Medical Marijuana:

* You could click the “Medical Marijuana” result from *Gale Encyclopedia of Everyday Law.*

Or, if you wanted an overview of the political and scientific controversies:

* You could click the “Medical Marijuana” result from *Science and Politics: An A-Z Guide to Issues and Controversies.*

This 2014 article is 8 pages long and divided into several subsections.

* Click the “Medical Marijuana and State-Level Legislative Activity” link to jump to this section.

Reference articles provide you with the basic facts surrounding your topic.

They give you a foundation.

You can find key concepts, people, and historical developments that might make great keywords as you search elsewhere—or even nicely focused paper topics.

* Click the “Top of Article” link to return to the article table of contents.
* Click the “Bibliography and Further Reading” link.

Most reference articles conclude with a brief bibliography or list of sources. You can use this list to find more articles. If you see a book or an article that looks perfect for your research, you may be able to find a copy at ACC.

Just ask a librarian if you need help.

Don’t forget to cite your source! Gale has a built-in citation generator.

* Look for “Citation Tools”
* Choose the citation style required by your instructor, such as MLA or APA
* Just highlight and copy the citation you need.

Citation tools aren’t perfect. It’s always a good idea to double-check your citations for accuracy.

**5. Conclusion**

**Other Sources**

Gale eBooks and CQ Researcher are two of the most commonly used online sources for background information.

But ACC Libraries provide access to *many others*!

These include:

* Oxford Reference
* American History Online
* Statista
* AccessScience

As always, if you have any questions about finding background information, just ask a librarian! Sometimes one of these sources have a lot of information on your topic and sometimes you have to try several of these databases to find the information you want.

**Recap**

In this tutorial you learned:

* Why background information is important
* How print and online reference sources can inform your research
* How to find background information in:
	+ CQ Researcher
	+ Gale eBooks

Now let’s check your understanding of these concepts.

**Quiz**

**Finding Background Information**

The following quiz consists of 5 multiple choice questions. Each question is worth 10 points. Type the correct answer in the blank provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Where should you look first for reliable, trustworthy background information for your academic papers?

A. Google

B. Wikipedia

C. library resources

D. friends and family

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Background information is most often:

A. detailed coverage of a single issue

B. basic names, facts, dates, and statistics

C. current research

D. book reviews, lifestyle features, and editorials

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The Reference Collection in a library is:

A. A print collection of background information

B. Located in a special place in the library

C. For in-library use only, so that it’s available to everyone

D. All of the above

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. CQ Researcher is a reference publication that is a good source for (check all that apply):

A. Encyclopedia articles

B. Pro/con arguments

C. Word definitions

D. Background reports on political and social issues

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Gale eBooks contains which of the following types of materials?

1. Subject-specific encyclopedias
2. Local news
3. Scientific research
4. Classic novels, plays, and poetry

If you are required to turn in this quiz to your professor, please print by selecting FILE => PRINT. If you are required to email the quiz to your professor or upload it to Blackboard, please choose FILE => SAVE.

Answer Key:

1. C
2. B
3. D
4. B, D
5. A