Starting your search

A literature search is a necessary part of the process of research. Whether it is your very first assignment, your dissertation or your PhD thesis, you need to know what has been written by others on your subject.

Analyse the topic
Consider your research question and what information you need to answer it.

Identify search terms
Think about words and phrases that relate to your topic and about synonyms. Consider how you want to link your search terms and ways of limiting the scope of your search. For example, do you only want to look at what's been published within the last year or the last 10 years, in one country or internationally?

Select the information sources
Where are you going to search? Google is good enough for general information finding, but the library gives access to a wide range of more specialist information sources in all subject areas that are more appropriate for a literature search. Identify the most relevant sources.

Adapt the strategy to fit the source
Magazines written for the general public use everyday non-technical language. Specialist journals use the jargon and special terminology related to that subject area. You may need to adapt your search.

Retrieve the information
If this library doesn't have an item in stock or available online, it may be possible to get it from another library. Other libraries will usually allow you to use their material for reference but not to borrow. If you are working on your dissertation you are entitled to free inter-library loans (items that we will obtain for you from other libraries).

Review the information
Look at what you've found and pick out the best quality, most reliable and most relevant information. If you have to write a literature review you will need to explain the relevance of the literature to your research topic.

Keep records
Remember to keep details of what you have used. This will help if you need to go back to something you have used before. It will also be essential in order to compile a bibliography or reference list.

Record-keeping options

- Index cards
- RefWorks / RefME software
- Online bookmarking services, for example, Delicious

What works for you?

The library can help you by providing:

- Books, journals and other items
- Ebooks and ejournals (usually available on and off campus 24/7)
- Access to information available in other libraries via inter-library loan
- Staff to help you

One-to-one information workshops:
- Make an appointment with your information librarian to discuss your particular research topic.
- They will be able to direct you to the most appropriate resources.

Books:
- To find books and ebooks use the library catalogue
- The library portal has a page which links to the catalogues of other libraries, local and national
- There are books in the study skills section on 0C that include chapters on doing a literature search and review

Journal articles:
- The library subscribes to many journals, ejournals and journal article databases which allow you to easily find articles on any subject.

eResources:
- The library has over 200 specialist eResources which fall into 3 categories:
    - Full text – the complete article or report online
    - Indexing and abstracting services – short references to articles
    - Multimedia resources – text, graphics, animations, images, music, video, etc.

These specialist information resources are accessed via the internet but are usually subscription based and only available to staff and students of Southampton Solent University. Most are available on and off campus, in most cases with passwords.

The internet:
- There is a lot of information available via the Internet but take care to consider its reliability before you use it.
- Look at the library catalogue or subject guides for links to recommended websites, specialist search engines and gateway sites for particular subject areas.

Help is also available from:
- succeed@solent – online help with literature searching
- for referencing and help with using referencing software such as RefWorks or RefME: http://portal.solent.ac.uk/library/referencing/referencing.aspx
- Other library factsheets and subject guides are available from under the HELP tab on the Library portal