Research Reading and Source Finding

When attempting to conduct any research, it is important to know how to find materials that will be beneficial, as well as how to utilize those materials appropriately in order to secure the needed information. It is important to know how to conduct research in order to find information effectively and efficiently. The following are a number of areas to consider when conducting research at the college level.

Source Finding:

Source Quality – It is important to consider the quality of the source that you are utilizing. This includes deciding if it is credible, current, or acceptable within your field of study. Many times, this is not considered when utilizing a source. This is an especially important consideration to make when using material found on the Internet. Things to consider are the author, the publisher, or the actual methods with which the research was conducted. When conducting research, if you have a doubt or question regarding the quality of a source you are considering, ask your professors, they will be able to help decide if it is an appropriate source.

Potential Sources – A great variety of potential sources are available for research. Most consider books, online sources, and magazines. However, there are a number of others worth looking into as potential sources as well. These could include newsletters, periodicals, microfiche, governmental documents, newsgroups, email newsletters, personal or phone interviews, first hand experiences, etc. By considering more than just the traditional sources, your information base will be vastly expanded.

Plagiarism – A perennial concern is that of plagiarism. This must be addressed with caution. The basic rule is that if it isn't your work, it must be cited properly. Proper citation formats can vary greatly, most common are APA and MLA formats. Without consideration for properly citing the sources of data you have utilized, it is highly possible that strong academic and/or copyright infringement repercussions may be resultant.

Online Article Repositories – One of the most prominent of these is Lexis-Nexis, an online article search of many major article sources in the world. While, for most individuals, this service would be very costly, many universities provide this free to their students. This is a fantastic search tool, especially when searching for current information. Lexis-Nexis is not the only tool of this nature; many others also exist and should be considered when conducting research.

Search engines – The Internet has a great number search engines that can be used to find material for research. Some are search engines have specific orientations and others are more general in nature. Each search engines strengths and weaknesses should be considered when conducting online searches for information.

Source Listings in Books – An often-overlooked source for potential sources that will be useful are listings in other places you have found to be useful and pertinent to your research.

Narrow Your Searches - When conducting searches, make sure that you narrow your searches appropriately to limit the amount of extraneous data that you find, but also allow yourself to get enough adequate data.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help – Many times, students have difficulty finding what they believe to be an adequate amount of valid sources. At most universities, there are individuals in the libraries, other students, or faculty who are more than willing to help students. Simply asking your professor or any other qualified individual will many times open the door to greater source finding ability.

Research Reading:

When reading for research, there are a few things to consider and a few techniques that may be helpful in becoming an effective researcher.

Scanning/Skimming – Scanning and skimming are two techniques that will help to find and analyze material in potential sources quickly in order to determine if further study should be undertaken. Scanning refers to quickly looking through a sources index, table of contents, or subject headings. Skimming refers to a more detailed search (yet not fully reading) of a source's content through analysis of key phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.

Take Notes Carefully – As a student conducts research, taking notes will help them later to more quickly organize the material into writing. For some, this works best to do directly onto a computer, while for others it is best to do in a notebook of some sort. Make sure when doing so that you are able to keep the notes in order and with the proper citation material.

Research Objectivity – Many times, as we research material, we must consider the point of view that the author is writing from. This can directly bias the material's content. It is also important when conducting research that we take into account our own bias about the material as well. Objectivity in research is fundamentally necessary in order to produce any respectable material.