

# Stage 2

## **Finding and managing information**



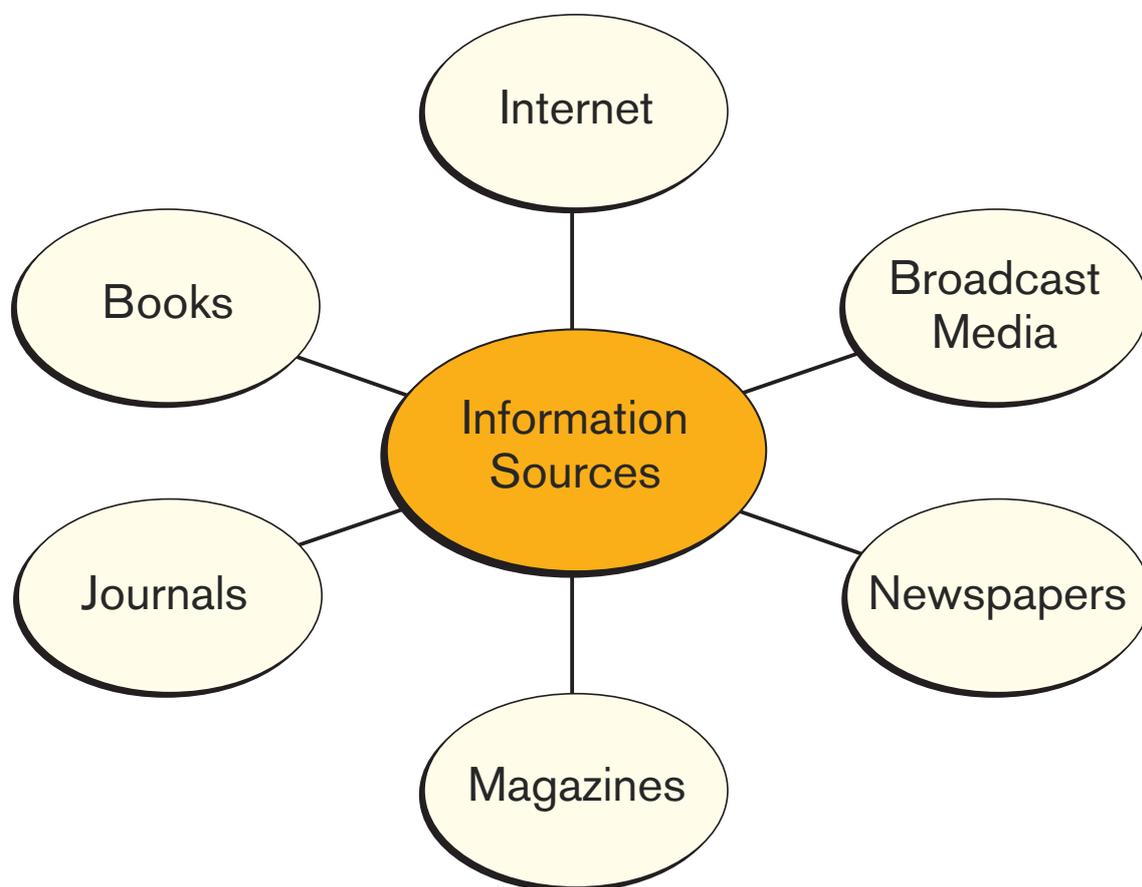


This section will help to:

- Use different sources to find information
- Plan your searching
- Evaluate the information used in your assignments
- Reference your sources and avoid plagiarism

## Where can I find information?

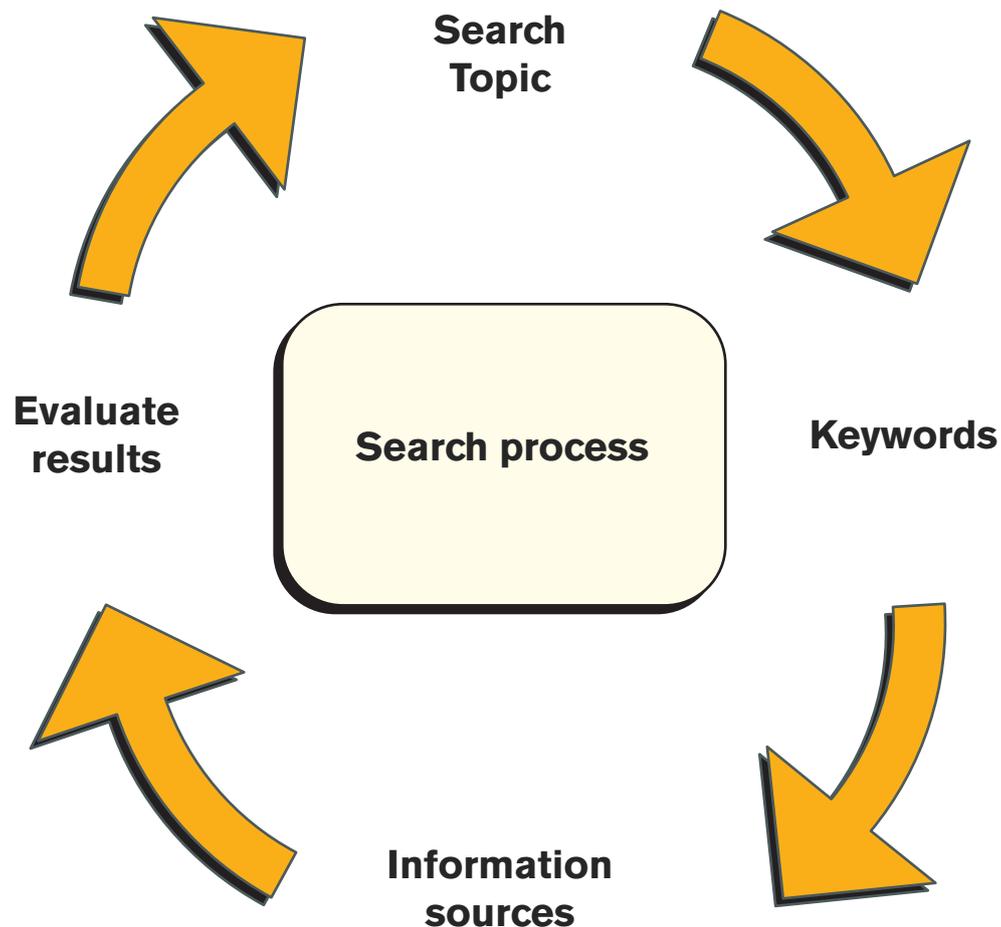
The examples below highlight **common sources of information** – you will need to use **several different sources** for your assignments/course work/projects.



There are clear differences between each type of information, and you must consider which sources are the most suitable for your assignments.

## Planning your search

Planning your searches will help you to find and assess suitable information for your assignments. Below is an example of a simple model which can be used to search for and assess information:



This model is **circular** – you are **thinking** about your topic, **identifying** keywords, **considering** which sources to use and **evaluating** your results, before **revising** your search strategy and beginning again.

This process is an important part of academic research. It will help you to organise your thoughts and arguments, to record what you have found and to critically analyse the evidence used in your assignments.

## How do I start searching?

Start by thinking about what you are being asked to do. Breaking down the title of your assignment and thoroughly reading your project brief will help you to identify keywords and topics for searching.

Once you have decided on your keywords, you must think about which sources you need to search. You may need to search several different types of sources in order to find the broadest possible range of information on your topic.

### Keyword Tip:

It is a good idea when searching to look at the **language and terms** used by **academics, professionals** and **experts** to describe or explain **ideas** and **theories** within your subject. The **terminology** used by these experts will also be used in **academic journals, books** and **websites**, and therefore make excellent keywords.

## Revising your search strategy

You will need to **narrow down** your search results to find the **most relevant information** – evaluating your results will help you to filter out irrelevant, false or misleading information.

Revising your search strategy by **changing keywords**, the **type of sources** used and the **time period** searched will ensure that you use the best available evidence for your assignments.

### Searching Tip:

Keeping records of the **sources** and **keywords** used and the results found will help you to **replicate your searches** and **check for new results**.

## Where should I search?

- Many **university, college** and **Local Government** websites will feature links to **library services** and **online catalogues**, enabling you to check book stock and journal holdings in advance.
- **Online databases** feature articles from many different journals. **Talk to your Librarian** for about using and accessing databases for your subject.
- **Information Gateways** gather web sources for study and research on one site. A good example is **Intute** (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/>), a multi-discipline gateway featuring evaluated resources for study and research.
- **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.co.uk>) features books, abstracts, theses, articles and academic papers from academic publishers, professional societies, universities and other scholarly organisations.

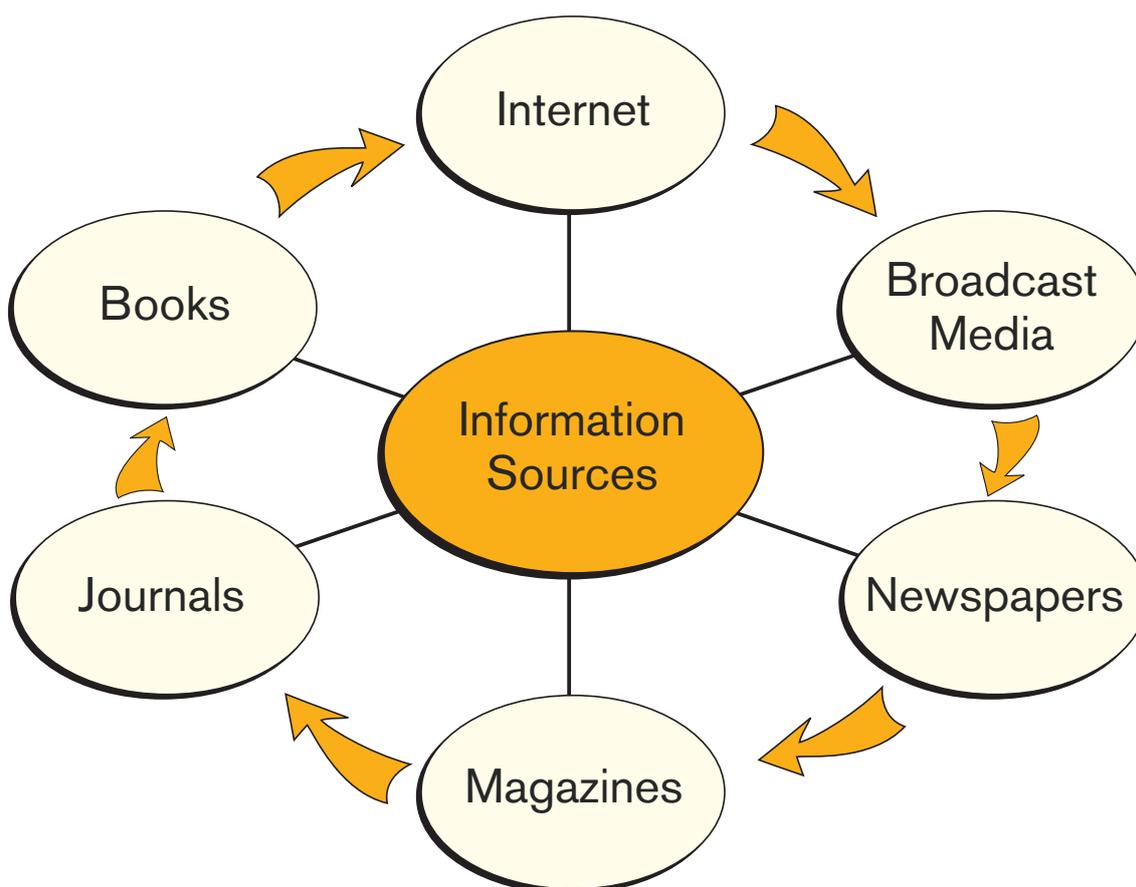
## Evaluating sources: The Information Cycle

Once you have found information it must be **evaluated**. A practical way of evaluating the information is to consider where information comes from and how it has been produced.

Look at the diagram below – it is the same as the list of sources we saw earlier, but now the relationship between the different sources is clearly shown – this is the **Information Cycle**.

The Information Cycle illustrates how information is published in set patterns. Information at the **beginning** of the cycle (Internet) is aimed at an audience wanting **quick, up-to-date facts**. As the information progresses around the Cycle it becomes more **detailed** but also **more out of date**. When deciding on the quality of the information you may have to balance **reliability** (accurate and proven facts) against **currency** (the period of time over which the information was written and produced).

THE INFORMATION  
CYCLE



## The Information Cycle in practice:

Information changes as it progresses along the Information Cycle from format to format:

### Internet

The Internet is usually the first place information is posted. Information can appear almost instantaneously on the Internet, but this leaves little time for the author to write the information. As a result the information tends to be **descriptive**, explaining **what has happened** and **who was involved** – it is simply stating facts. There will also be a **lack of depth** and the information posted will be short.

### Broadcast Media

Information is also likely to appear quickly on **television** and **radio**. Initially the information will be produced rapidly and is likely to be **descriptive**, explaining **what has happened** and **who was involved**.

Professional journalists with expertise in a particular area may be able to provide some relevant background information, and it is likely that **expert opinion** will also be sought. As time passes and more information becomes available, **longer pieces** and **documentary** features may be produced.

### Newspapers

Newspapers are published frequently; usually daily or weekly. The articles will be written by **professional journalists**, who often have **expertise in a particular area**.

The emphasis will be on **reporting facts**, and once the information appears in newspapers the author has had more time research the information, so there may be **greater depth** such as **statistics**, **analysis** or **expert opinion**.

Newspaper articles will **not be correctly referenced** and they will **not provide a bibliography or list of sources**, so it will be difficult to identify where the author has found their information.

The articles are aimed at the **general public**, and so should use **accessible language**.

## Magazines

Magazines are frequent publications in a 'glossy' format. Examples include *The New Scientist*, *The Economist* and *Scientific American*. The articles are written by **professional journalists** with **knowledge of a specific subject area**.

There will be emphasis on **reporting facts** but usually with some analysis as the author has more time to reflect on the information and conduct some research.

Although articles in the professional press are likely to be longer than newspaper articles they are unlikely to be correctly **referenced** with no **bibliography** or **list of sources**, so it is difficult to tell what sources the author has used in their research.

The articles are aimed at the **general public** or a **knowledgeable layperson** with an interest in the area of publication, and so should use **accessible language**.

## Journals

Academic journals contain articles written by **scholars** and **specialist researchers**. The authors have had time to **conduct their own research** and **review the available literature**.

As a result the article will be a detailed examination of the subject with **analysis** and **primary research**. Research can take months to conduct, so the article will not be current. Before publication the articles are reviewed by an **editorial board** comprising of other scholars and experts – this is called **peer review**.

The articles in academic journals are aimed at **scholars, experts in the field** and **university students**, therefore the articles tend to be detailed and written in **technical language**.

## Books

Books may take years to be published, and so are not good sources of up to date information. The strength of books as a resource lies in their authorship, they are usually written by **scholars and experts in the field**. Their content can be variable ranging from a simplified overview of a subject to an in depth piece of research.

Books offer a great introduction to a new subject. Books include a list of the sources the author has used to research their book called a reference list. The reference list allows you to **review** the **original sources** of information used in the book, which can be used in your assignments to strengthen your own research and arguments.

## Evaluating sources: Thinking critically

Thinking critically in order to evaluate the sources you use will help you to select the best sources for your assignment. A good way to do this is by asking the following questions:

### Who has written, produced or published the information?

Is the source **biased**? Can you **verify** the information presented?

**Example:** Political broadcasts will argue in favour of a particular idea or political party, and will therefore feature **bias**. The Office of National Statistics collates information from Government departments, but the statistics are **independently recorded** and **verifiable**.

### Why have they written it?

What is the **purpose** of the information? Is the writer or publisher trying to sell me something?

**Example:** An advertisement will try to persuade you to buy a product.

### When was the information written or published?

Is it still useful, and is it likely to be updated?

**Example:** For some subjects such as Science, it is important to have the **most up to date and accurate** information. For other subjects such as History or Journalism, **accounts of the time** are **valuable first hand evidence**, and will be essential for your work.

De Montfort University's **Evaluation Source Matrix** provides a useful framework for assessing the sources you use:

<http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Images/Selfstudy/ISEMLeaflet.pdf>

## Referencing and Citation

### Why should I reference?

**No academic research is entirely original** – many ideas come from other people's research. It is important to acknowledge this within your work because:

- Who said what (and when) is important – otherwise ideas could be misrepresented and falsified.
- Allows ideas to be traced back – the “long conversation” of academic research
- Aids the production of a good argument. You are not alone: past research provides vital back-up!
- Demonstrates you have understood where your ideas are coming from = more credibility = better marks
- Correct attribution is simply 'honest and open'
- Academic research would be impossible without having a system in place to trace ideas back – that system is **referencing**.

### Referencing the sources you've used

It is **good academic practice** within your assignments to acknowledge where you have found your information. There are two key elements when referencing correctly:

#### Citing

Information is accredited within your assignment, usually in the format of the Author followed by the date of Publication in brackets.

**Example:** Pears and Shields (2009) argue that...

#### Referencing

A list of references is usually found at the end of your assignment, arranged alphabetically by author and providing full details of the information you have used in a standard format which includes the Author, Date, Title, Place of publication and Publisher

**Example:** PEARS, R. and SHIELDS, G. (2008) *Cite them right: the essential referencing guide*, Rev. ed. Newcastle upon Tyne: Pear Tree Books.

**Always ask if you're not sure!**

## Quoting and Citing – what should I reference?

- If you reproduce writing word-for-word, this is a **quote** and should be in “quotation marks” or indented in the text.
- If you paraphrase someone else’s idea, it should be acknowledged and **cited** in the text.
- In both cases, the acknowledgement in the text should refer to your **reference list**. Any book read but not directly quoted or cited in the text should still be listed in the **bibliography**.

### Bibliography

A bibliography includes any sources you have read as part of your research. Bibliographies can be annotated and are a useful means of directing readers to further sources of information.

## Harvard referencing style

There are many different referencing styles. One of the most commonly used is called Harvard. A Harvard reference would look like this:

AUTHOR(S)		DATE	TITLE	
PEARS, R. & SHIELDS, G.		(2008)	<i>Cite them right: the essential referencing</i>	
<i>guide,</i>	Rev. ed.	Newcastle upon Tyne:	Pear Tree Books	
TITLE	EDITION (if not first)	PLACE OF PUBLICATION	PUBLISHER	

### Referencing Tips:

- Keep a record of all the books and articles you find **as you find them** (create your reference list/bibliography as you go along).
- Give yourself plenty of time to research and write your work (this will allow you to avoid the temptation for last-minute ‘panic plagiarism’)
- Always cite the sources used in your assignments – both **direct quotes** and **ideas you have paraphrased**. This is the basis of ‘good academic practice’.

For more information about citation and referencing, please see De Montfort University’s **Harvard System of referencing guide** at:

<http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Images/Selfstudy/Harvard.pdf>

## Avoiding Plagiarism

Many students are uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism. Below are two related but very different definitions of plagiarism:

### Plagiarism is...

1. The deliberate attempt to gain advantage by presenting someone else's work as your own
2. The substantial duplication of another's work without acknowledgement of the original source

**The first is intentional** – where a student uses another **individual or organisation's work** (whether an **academic, a fellow student or a third party**) and **submits it as their own**. There are heavy penalties for students who are discovered to have intentionally submitted work which is not their own.

**The second is accidental** – where a student **uses information** from a book, journal etc., but **does not credit** the information source within their assignment. This can be avoided by **accurate referencing** and **citation**, and **acknowledging your sources**.

### Bad Academic Practice

"Plagiarism by mistake"

- ✓ Universities will have policies in place to detect both deliberate and accidental plagiarism
- ✓ Both plagiarism and bad academic practice attract severe penalties – avoid them!

For more information about plagiarism, see De Montfort University's **How to avoid Plagiarism and be citation wise** guide at:

<http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Images/Howto/HowtoAvoidPlagiarism.pdf>