

How to research for History

Created by Inaburra Senior Library 2020

Google isn't a good place to look for resources for history tasks once you're in Year 11 and 12. If you plan your search and look in more specialised places you can save yourself time and find better resources.

Step 1: PLANNING

Visit somewhere like History.com, Encyclopaedia Britannica or the BBC for an overview. You can also use Wikipedia for this.

Save the details of any resources the article refers to that might be useful to you, and keep an eye out for keywords.

An easy way to search the BBC is to search for your topic followed by site:bbc.com OR site:bbc.co.uk.

After you've done some background reading, stop and write a research question. This will keep you on track as you search for information, and help you decide which resources are relevant and which aren't.

Write in on a post it note and stick it on your computer if that helps.

While we're on the subject of Wikipedia...

Good for:

- Background reading to understand the topic
- Finding keywords
- Finding sources of information (check the article's references at the bottom of the page)

Don't use it as a final source

- It's not necessarily reliable
- There are much better sources out there

Use Wikipedia as a stepping stone to better resources

Now you understand the topic

Write down the keywords you will need to search.

- Do any have synonyms or are any referred to by multiple terms?
- If you're researching a person, do they go by multiple names or titles?

Now re-read your research question and think about...

- What sort of information do you need? Books? Websites? Journal articles?
- Do you need information that gives an overview of the whole topic or information that provides an in-depth look at one aspect of the topic?
- Do you need primary sources or analysis? Do you need images?

Step 2: SEARCHING

You know what you're looking for, but where is the best place to look?

You'll need to look in different places for different types of information.

Get out of the habit of thinking you can just Google it

Really useful advice:

When you find a useful resource make a note of its bibliographic details right away to save you having to find it again when you're doing your bibliography.

Books

- School
- Sutherland Shire Libraries - *You can search their catalogue online*
- NSW State Library - *You can search their catalogue online*
- Digital books
 - Google Books
 - Project Gutenberg

If you know of a particular book you need and your local library doesn't have it, ask them about an inter-library loan.

Primary sources

Many libraries, museums and archives have digitised parts of their collections and made them available on their websites.

What geographic area is your topic based in? Look online to see what libraries and museums are in that area and whether they have online collections.

For ancient history, remember that a lot of artefacts are no longer in their country of origin so look at libraries and museums where they are housed now, not where they originally came from. (The British Museum is a good starting point)

Databases

This is where you find scholarly and peer-reviewed articles.

- NSW State Library databases
- Google Scholar
- Open Access databases

When searching databases, always go to the advanced search page and tick the box that says 'full text'.

Google

Google is useful for finding specialised websites created by experts at universities

Put site:.edu after your keywords

Eg. Pompeii site:.edu

Not sure if they're an expert? Google the author's name. Have they written books on the topic? Are there contact details for the university faculty they belong to? Are their qualifications there?

You can also try using site:.gov after your keywords to see if government-run cultural institutions have information on your topic.

Step 3: EVALUATING

- For trustworthiness
- For bias

Read everything critically. Just because a source is biased it doesn't mean it isn't useful, but you need to be aware what the bias is, especially if your task requires you to analyse how useful the source is.

RECAP

1. Background reading
2. Write a research question
3. What keywords are you going to search with?
4. Where do you need to go to search?
5. Evaluate