Conducting Research in Literary Studies

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The databases referenced below are accessible through the USC Upstate Library at http://www.uscupstate.edu/library.

General Advice

- o Don't wait until the night before an assignment is due to learn how these resources work. Spend some time now playing around with them so that you become familiar with their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their potential for unexpected glitches.
- o You should usually look for recently published material first, and then work your way back in time, if necessary.
- o Always take notes on your search activities so you do not have to repeat yourself.
    - o Which resource did you search?
    - o What search terms did you use?
    - o How many results did each search return?
- o Always check first to see how many results are returned from your initial search. If you have too many, refine your search strategy by using the "advanced search" options. If you get 1,000 results in response to your initial search of the *MLA Bibliography*, for example, you might start refining by specifying that you're only interested in the last 10 years worth of material.
- o Save your search results electronically or email them to yourself. It's fine, of course, to write things down in a notebook, but doing so is more time consuming and puts the results of your searches into a format that you might lose or misplace. By contrast, you can access your email from anywhere.
- o Always browse the footnotes and references of the sources you find through these resources in order to find more material.
- o Pay attention if a particular scholar is cited often by others. That person's work is important, and you should become familiar with it, regardless of how long ago it was published.

How to locate information and sources

Starting places: Reference works

Although **they are not usually appropriate for incorporating into an academic paper**, these resources are useful when you want to get the **basic** facts about an author, a work of literature, a period in literary history, a genre, or a literary term.

Usually you will not need to include reference definitions in a paper as your professors will know a basic definition of these concepts and terms. Include it ONLY if you wish to disagree or critique an existing definition, and even then try to find a scholarly article or book about the subject to cite instead. Many of them are incredibly annoying to cite because they are like a "reader's digest" of short excerpts from other, real sources.

Oxford English Dictionary

"*The Oxford English Dictionary* [*OED*] is widely acknowledged to be the most authoritative and comprehensive dictionary of English in the world, and the definitive record of English language development over the last fifteen hundred years." This is the only general dictionary worth citing in an upper-level English course.

Use the *OED* when you need to learn any or all of the following about a particular word:
- o When and where the word first appeared in print;
- o How the word's meaning has changed over time, which can be particularly important when reading material written hundreds of years ago (for example, look up "fond," "want," "cousin," or "wench" and consider what they meant in 1650);
- o What other words are related to the word;
- o The word's language of origin, such as Latin, German, French, or Greek.

Oxford Reference Online: Premium Collection

The *Oxford Reference Online: Premium Collection* includes timelines, biographies, encyclopedias, and textbook entries from a variety of Oxford University Press publications.

Use *Oxford Reference Online* **when** you need a biography of an author, a definition of a literary term, a history of a literary period or timeline of literary events, or basic overview of a text in order to provide historical context and background or to find general information that could lead you to a topic for more complete research. This database also includes reference materials for a variety of other fields.

Literature Resource Center

"*Literature Resource Center*...allows access to biographies, bibliographies, and critical analyses of more than 120,000 authors from every age and literary discipline. Scribner Writer's Series [see below] includes 15-20 page signed essays on more than 1,600 authors and literary genres drawn from 13 acclaimed Scribner print series. Twayne World, US, and English Authors each contains the full text of 200 frequently used Twayne Literary Masters books on individual World, US, or English authors, for a total of 600 full-text titles."

Use the *Literature Resource Center* **when** you need a quick biography of an author or basic overview of a text in order to pick an author or optional reading or to find general information that could lead you to a topic for more complete research.

Finding Sources: Peer-reviewed Publications

MLA Bibliography

You should always consult this database first when looking into what scholars have written about a topic related to language & literature: although it does not always provide you with direct links to full-text versions of the sources, the *MLA Bibliography* is considered the authoritative guide to what has been published. This database contains "a bibliography of journal articles, books and dissertations. Produced by the Modern Language Association, the electronic version of the Bibliography dates back to 1963 and contains over 1.5 million citations from more than 4,400 journals and series and 1,000 book publishers."

Use this database as your **MAIN research tool to find books and articles that you may cite in an upper-level English course**. If you want to learn what's been published in the last few decades on your topic, this is the place to go. If you want to learn more about a particular journal in which an article was published, the MLA Bibliography provides a direct link within each entry to that journal's entry in another database (the MLA Directory of Periodicals), where you can learn such things about the journal as its circulation number (which gives you a sense of how influential it is) and date of origin (which gives you a sense of how established it is).

Tips: Unless you want to know about new directions scholars are going with a subject, you should **click "exclude dissertations."** You will rarely need to use a dissertation in undergraduate-level research. You may search for author, literary text, literary terms, literary periods, theoretical concepts, or various issues or themes you want to research.

If a source is not available in full-text in the MLA Bibliography, you may be able to find it in our library or in another database. Search the Library Catalog for a book or Journal Finder for an article. Articles are often available in *JSTOR*, *Project Muse*, or *Academic Search Premier*. If all else fails, use PASCAL or ILL to see if it can be obtained from another library.

JSTOR

"*JSTOR* offers full-text on-line access to back issues of more than 100 scholarly journals in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Issues are entered on-line after having been published for 2-5 years. The entire printed matter of the journal as published is included, and coverage for most titles begins with their starting issues."

Use *JSTOR* **to find full text of articles identified in the *MLA Bibliography* or to do historical research** on primary or secondary texts from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Tips: The *JSTOR* search engine is more frustrating than the *MLA Bibliography*. I usually search *MLA Bibliography*, then open *JSTOR* to cross-check the sources found in *MLA Bibliography* and obtain the full-text article.

JSTOR is better at historical material than contemporary, so be sure to SORT BY DATE—MOST RECENT FIRST. Unless you are doing a history-based project, you do NOT want to cite articles from the 1940s, 1960s, or 1970s in your research papers.

Finally, *JSTOR* includes hundreds of thousands of reviews. Be sure to click on **ADVANCED SEARCH and click ARTICLES only** to avoid thousands of useless book reviews.

[Project MUSE](#)
"*Project MUSE* provides only full-text articles from over 300 high quality humanities, arts, and social sciences journals from 60 scholarly publishers. Every title in *Project MUSE* is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal."
   Use *Project MUSE* to find current, full-text articles from great academic journals. Use Project MUSE **to browse recent issues of academic journals in a field** you like to see what is new in your field.
   Tips: *Project MUSE* contains great articles and great journals, but not a great search engine. As with *JSTOR*, I search the *MLA Bibliography* to find what I want, then I search *Project MUSE* to see the full-text of the article.
   Often journals run special issues devoted to a single subject. If you find one article you like, you might want to BROWSE the table of contents of that journal to see if there are other related articles that might point you in a good direction.

How to retrieve sources

Remember to obtain both the source you will read as part of your research AND the bibliographic information you will need to cite the source on your Works Cited page.

From an Article Database, such as *MLA Bibliography* or *Project MUSE*
- o Click on the PDF of the article whenever possible to provide you with an electronic photocopy of the article—with page numbers. You may save the PDF, print it, or email it to yourself for future reference. In many cases, you may even register with the database, log in, and save you searches or favorite sources right there.
- o If you use Zotero on Firefox (Web browser), you may click to obtain a full MLA citation. If you are in the *MLA Bibliography*, you may click on the detailed record, then click the button for "Cite this article" (looks like a piece of paper) and copy the MLA Style citation. You usually need to delete the month from the citation it generates and fill in the brackets with the details of our library.

For example, this is what you get from the MLA database. Bold items need to be changed.

Anderson, Elizabeth. "Dancing Modernism: Ritual, Ecstasy and the Female Body." *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture* 22.3 (2008): 354-367. *MLA International Bibliography*. **EBSCO.** Web. 21 Oct. 2010.

You need to change it to the following in current MLA Style. Remove the reference to EBSCO and format with hanging indent. Also double-check the capitalization of the major words in the title and confirm that you have both starting and ending page numbers.

Anderson, Elizabeth. "Dancing Modernism: Ritual, Ecstasy and the Female Body." *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture* 22.3 (2008): 354-367. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Oct. 2010.

From Journal Finder
- o Accessible from the lefthand column of the USC Upstate library homepage
- o Use this resource if you haven't found the full text of an article in *JSTOR*, *Project MUSE*, or *MLA*.
- o Type in the name of the **journal**, not the article, and *TDNet* tells you whether USC Upstate's library has full-text articles from that journal in one of its databases or on the library shelves.
- o In another window, open the library database with the full-text of the journal you need (check the dates). Search for the article title or author. Save, print, or email. Copy down the citation information you need for your Works Cited page.

From our library
- o Search our library catalog (link available on the left-hand column of our library home page) to learn what books and journals we have on the shelves, available for you to check out.
- o If you photocopy pages from a book, be sure to photocopy the title page and copyright page. You will need them for your Works Cited. I usually write the library call number on my photocopy as well in case I need to return to the library to look at the book again.

From other libraries
- o Use our library catalog to search all of the libraries in the USC system at once. **On the main search page, change search form from "Upstate Library" to "USC All Libraries."** If a book is in the USC system, click on the PASCAL button to request it. You need the barcode on the back of your USC Upstate ID to request a book, but it gets delivered to our library, and you receive an email to let you know when it arrives.
- o Use the PASCAL catalog to search all of the libraries in South Carolina at once. Once you do a search in our library catalog, you will see the PASCAL button under the bar listing the number of records you have found. **Click on PASCAL to get to the search box for all SC libraries**. You may request books with your ID barcode, and you will receive an email when they arrive.
- o Use the **WorldCat database** in the USC Upstate library databases at http://www.uscupstate.edu/library/databases/dbDetails.asp?details=WOC. Search **WorldCat** for titles of books or periodicals we do not own. When you find your title, click "Libraries Worldwide" to see a list of libraries which own the item. It will list the South Carolina libraries first. You may find you can drive to Wofford, Converse, Furman, or even Clemson to read a copy of a book before you could receive the book through PASCAL. You may also use the information you find in WorldCat about which libraries own the item to help you fill our the ILL form and obtain your request more quickly.
- o Use the **Interlibrary Loan online** form available on the left-hand column of the USC Upstate library home page to request books or articles that are not available in our library, through PASCAL, or in a database. You will receive photocopies of journal articles. The photocopies are yours to keep.