**WRT 105 | Byrd Library Research - Database Assignment**

**Our Working Context**

***Part of writing a strong argumentative essay is to acknowledge that your topic, and the argument you hope to make, is part of a larger critical conversation***—this conversation can exist in many forms, and many genres, in many contexts, and through many mediums. Academic discourse is one of those contexts, as are the various fields that we find on campus. Different disciplines, like sociology, political science, psychology, etc. all different discourse communities, really, engage in critical conversations about numerous subjects by having—by writing about—topics that coincide and also engage with the issue-based question you have in development.

A key part of honing and refining that issue-based question into a larger thesis argument / thesis cluster is to investigate the scope and shape of that ongoing conversation, as is determining how your issue-based question (& subsequent thesis cluster) fits into that same conversation.

***We call this “doing research.”***

The argumentative essay that you are working on is part of that critical conversation, and as such, it’s good to include others participants in the conversation, those who have something invested or at stake in the topic. For our purposes here, academic scholars and the things they write and study about your issue-based question, as part of that conversation (i.e. Step 5 from Handout 5). Including others in your argument ***adds complexity to your claims***, and also ***establishes a sense of ethos with your readers*** who recognize that you’re something of a knowledgeable mini-expert on your topic and that you are a credible authority who draws from and engages with other experts in the field.

As part of our Unit project, the class will twice use the library’s (scholarly) databases to discover the content and shape of the critical conversation surrounding your issue-based question & developing thesis cluster. Initially, we will look for scholarly sources as part of our beginning research—the supporting evidence from our *Writing Analytically* model—and then at a later point, we will look for complicating evidence to further refine our thesis cluster. The sources you find should be of a scholarly nature – ideally from peer-reviewed journals, or perhaps by a scholar from an academic field writing for a non-scholarly audience—which you can then use to supplement the mostly popular sources we’ve been reading for the unit.

Plan on incorporating at least one of the two sources you find, but also plan on citing both sources in a “Works Cited & Consulted” page at the end of your essay.

**Database Research Walkthrough Assignment**

This assignment will gain you some familiarity with the library’s databases. Your task is to ***find two (2) sources*** that are part of the critical conversation surrounding your issue-based question. These sources should shed some light on your topic, perhaps provide some key information or data about your topic, or perhaps offer a critical interpretative perspective / argument about your topic.

***The gist here is*** that you are looking for sources that will either **a)** provide necessary information about your topic, which you may then use to support the claims/arguments you make about your topic, or **b)** provide a counter-argument perspective for your topic.

***Remember that different disciplines are different discourse communities that each use genres that define and shape how they approach knowledge in unique ways.*** As go the disciplines, so to go the various databases you’ll encounter. With each database, be sure to ***ask problem-posing questions*** as to how that discipline / area approaches information. Doing so will greatly help your research process!

***For each source that you choose (at least one must be scholarly):***

* ***Save the source to your computer and bookmark its*** [***Permalink***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permalink)***.***
* ***Complete the Source Information Form and print it out.***
* ***Print out the following from your source (academic sources tend to be lengthy): The first two pages (don’t include the db coversheet) of the source, and two pages from the source that are most important to your issue-based question / potential thesis cluster.***
* ***Staple your Source Information Form to the top of your source pages.***

***The (re)Search Process***

Start at the library’s front door here: <http://library.syr.edu/>

From the library’s front door, you, as the researcher, will have three distinct routes you may take in search for the conversation that is taking place about your issue-based question.

***Each route offers you a melding of convenience and customization,*** ***a trade-off between the accuracy of your search and the amount of time /number of hits you’ll spend / wade through in the hopes of finding a helpful / appropriate source***.

Two other routes provide you with more accurate and less willy-nilly, see-what-turns-up, targeted results.

Select ***Find > Databases***will allow you to choose specific databases that are subject / discipline specific and best suited to your issue-based question; select ***Recommended Databases*** > JSTOR | LEXIS-NEXIS | Pro-Quest Central |SCOPUS| Web of Science etc. and each choice offers you a targeted multi-subject area studies database to keep your search concentrated on those disciplines most relevant to your issue-based question.

We’ll use these two options with our second database exercise in a few days.

For our purposes right now, use:

***SUMMON***

SUMMON is an incredibly powerful search engine as it allows you to cull through what was once a process of searching multiple databases single or in small groups, while also having to cull through various source types and accessibility. SUMMON integrates hardcopy sources (books, journals, periodicals, various media) the SU library system owns, and provides you digital access to hardcopy sources (where available) as well as digital only information sources.

From the Syracuse University Libraries front door, enter into SUMMON the search terms that pertain to your topic, but realize that the more terms you enter, the narrower your hit list will become.

That list will always be large – not quite Google-large, but big, and of such a click-wearying, bleary-eyed, butt-numbing proportion as to send you to your most favorite of procrastination activities. For instance: A sample-search using the terms “digital” & “life” produced this message: “**Search Results:** Your search for **digital life** returned **3,506,408** results.”

When doing your search, your task is to whittle-down the hit list by using the task bar at left. The task bar contains a helpful list of five (5) headings that will enable you to refine and hone your search by type and content of information contained in your hit list. At left, from top to bottom of the page:

**Refine Your Search > Content Type > Subject Terms> Publication Date >Language**

Use the descriptive subheadings under each of these to narrow the hit list. You’ll also notice that the subheadings have numbers in parentheses at right that indicate the number of entries that conform to that descriptor.

As you conduct your research, you’ll find that you’ll get varying results by mixing and matching search terms, as well as combining those terms into search phrases—the goal, though, will be to determine not only which combination works best for you and your issue-based question, but which of the sources you find provides you with the best information for your budding thesis argument. Don’t let a great result halt your search! Chances are that another, even better source is available.

**\*\*\* Print out the required pages from two (2) scholarly sources, the Source Information Sheets for each (stapled on top), and bring to class. Also post these to the class blog and your blog site too.**

**WRT 105 | Source Information Form**

Complete this form ***for each of the sources*** you find / draw from your library database research.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Title:** |  |
| **Author(s):** |  |
| **Publication:** |  |
| **Publication Info (volume #, page #s, month and year, if part of source’s info)** |  |
| **Pub. Type: (newspaper, popular magazine, trade journal, journal of opinion, scholarly journal)** |  |
| **Date of Publication:** |  |
| **Date Accessed:** |  |
| **Source Type: (review, letter to editor, editorial, column, article, journal article, popular book chapter, scholarly book chapter)** |  |
| **Permalink:** |  |
| **Database: (db name / library catalog)** |  |
| **Main argument of source:** |  |
| **How source is relevant to my topic issue:** |  |
| **How I envision using this source:** |  |
| **Additional Notes / Important Details:** |  |

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