

Instruction and Assessment Units





UNIT 3: RESEARCH SKILLS

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Overview

This unit outlines skills that will be used in conjunction with other units and projects throughout the course. Research on topics in any Social Justice 12 unit will require the use of these skills. In this unit, the various skills may be used individually for a brief research task, in order to practise a skill in isolation; alternatively, the activities in this unit can be delivered in conjunction with a research project identified in one of the other units. As students become familiar with the skills, and confident in using them, several skills may be required to complete a project or research task.

This unit will address the following key research skills:

- devising key questions to focus research
- locating print resources, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, newspapers, magazines, books
- navigating print resources, using tables of contents, indexes, headings, alphabetized materials
- use of online resources, such as databases, specified web sites, dictionaries and encyclopedias

- use of different search engines and search techniques
- assessing reliability of information sources
- assessing bias and currency in information sources
- taking notes appropriately in order to have accurate information while avoiding plagiarism
- citing sources appropriately (for bibliographies, for in-text quotations).

Where applicable, plan to conduct this unit in conjunction with the school's teacher-librarian to support the development of students' research skills.

A series of assessment tools is provided at the end of this unit.

Note: this unit focusses on traditional research methods using print and online resources. However, useful information for a variety of topics will come from other types of sources, particularly interviews with stakeholders. Throughout this unit, look for opportunities to examine how the same research skills can be applied to personal interviews and guest speakers.





Prescribed Learning Outcomes

This unit can be used to help students achieve the following prescribed learning outcome in whole or in part:

Defining Social Justice

A2 demonstrate effective research skills, including

- accessing information
- assessing information
- collecting data
- evaluating data
- organizing and presenting information

Devising Key Questions to Focus Research

Provide students with a general topic and ask them to narrow the focus on that topic. Students are required to generate several questions that will guide their research on this topic. Questions are meant to guide research, not restrict inquiry; therefore, questions may be revised throughout the research process. Further questions may arise as a result of new information.

Referring to their questions, have students create lists of search terms that may be useful in locating key words in print resources (headings, tables of contents, indexes, glossaries), as well as in online searches.

For example: Students may be asked to research an important person who has contributed to progress on a specific social justice issue. Students will be asked to search for relevant facts about the person's background and involvement in social justice. When brainstorming in class, students may generate a list of guiding questions, such as the following:

- What type of family, childhood, education, and experiences did this person have?
- With what social justice issue is this person associated?
- What actions on the part of this person furthered the cause of social justice?

- Did any of these actions result in changes to laws, policies, or attitudes? If so, what were the changes?
- Was this person's identity and membership in a particular group crucial to his or her success?
- What current benefits exist as a result of this person's actions?

Locating Print Resources

Students should become familiar with their school's library catalogue and the procedure for locating books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, newspapers, and magazines in their school library. Some resources may be located in particular areas in the library. Locating non-fiction books usually requires use of the library catalogue. Not all non-fiction resources will be located in the same section of the library (or have similar Dewey decimal numbers).

Ask students to locate one of each of the listed resources and find a reference to their topic, if possible (e.g., a magazine article, newspaper article, encyclopedia article, dictionary definition, thesaurus reference).

Navigating Print Resources

Ask students to peruse a non-fiction book to determine how the Table of Contents is organized and how the sections, chapters, indices, headings, and appendices can be





used to find information quickly. Students should become familiar with the index of encyclopedias and use the index to locate information on their topic.

Using Online Resources

Databases can make finding useful web sites more efficient, since the web sites listed in the database have already been chosen for usefulness. To facilitate the process, provide students with a list of web site addresses relevant to social justice in general, or to specific social justice topics in particular. (A list of selected web sites, which can be used as a starting point, is provided as part of this resource.)

Demonstrate the use of databases to which the library subscribes. Students can practise using the search engine within the database to locate relevant information. Students can visit suggested web sites to find useful information. Students may visit the generic dictionaries and encyclopedias available on the Internet to locate information on their topics. If the library subscribes to online encyclopedias, students may visit those sites.

Using Search Engines and Search Techniques

Many search engines exist and students should be aware of at least several. Google and Yahoo are so commonly used that advertisers use them extensively. Other search engines include: metacrawler.com, askjeeves.com, alltheweb.com, hotbot.com, teoma.com, altavista.com, gigablast.com, looksmart.com

Students should use the “refine” search feature on some of the search engines to test their usefulness and familiarize themselves with this helpful feature.

Conduct a web quest (Internet scavenger hunt) to challenge students to use several different search engines to search similar

words and phrases and to compare the results. Debrief as a class, discussing the usefulness of different search engines for specific purposes.

Assessing Reliability of Information Sources

Ascertaining the basic “works cited” information about a source will usually give some indication of its reliability. Using several different sources of information will be helpful in judging the validity of information, as the information from different sources should corroborate each other.

Students may search several different sources and formats of information about a specific topic. Similar basic information should be found in different sources. “Works cited” information should be available for each source.

Students should complete a worksheet to record works cited as they do their search for information. The purpose of this sheet is simply to record the information and, where possible, attempt to verify the credentials of the author.

Assessing Bias and Currency

The writer of an article or book may, because of training or allegiance, have a particular perspective or attitude about the subject. Any information that is not strictly factual or any interpretation of the information may indicate a particular bias. Being aware of the bias will assist the reader to judge the usefulness of the information. Reading two or three sources with different biases is advisable to make a balanced judgment about a topic.

For currency, the date of a publication or online source (as well as the source) will be important, especially if research is being cited. Usually, the more recent the date of publication, the more current the information. Several sources, as recent as available, should be consulted to verify the accuracy of information.





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Students should read two or three articles about the same topic and make notes about the author's credentials and about the author's opinions and main points. The articles can be compared for accuracy and the points of view can be compared. Authors of different backgrounds may derive different conclusions from similar evidence. Students can make a chart to compare each author's credentials and opinions on the same topic.

For example: students may read three or four articles discussing the *Canadian Civil Marriage Act*, and record the reactions of several writers, comparing their backgrounds, affiliations, funding sources, opinions, and biases. Students can then write a paragraph or essay explaining the differences and drawing their own conclusion about the biases of the writer.

Several articles on a similar topic may be read, recording the date of writing and the background of the author. Any differences should be noted. Students can then write a paragraph or essay explaining the differences and drawing their own conclusions about the effect of currency.

Taking Notes Appropriately to Avoid Plagiarism

A common tendency is for students to copy words, phrases, and sentences directly from research material. Sometimes, students don't even realize that they are plagiarizing.

Students may read an article on a topic in the course and then take notes in their own words. Instead of recording whole sentences, students should be encouraged to record words and phrases that will remind them of the main points of the article. They should be encouraged to make these notes after reading and without looking at the article.

Demonstrate, with suggestions from students, how to take these notes. When students have completed their notes, they may write a paragraph that explains what the article says and whether or not they agree with the views presented.

Citing Sources Appropriately

Students should already be familiar with formats for citing sources, but should be reminded at this point, particularly if one particular style is preferred over the other (e.g., MLA, APA). Include a focus on

- citing sources for in-text quotations
- citing sources for a bibliography.

Provide students with some samples of different types of sources and show how to format them correctly. Have students practise formatting different print and online sources. You may also choose to administer a practice quiz to format various types of sources.

Have students complete a bibliography to accompany a research project of their own. Have them include a prescribed number of in-text quotations in their research, cited correctly.





Assessment Instrument

Key Questions for Research

Name: _____ Date: _____

Note your participation in the class assignment and assign a rating according to the following:

- 3 Excellent (frequent, regular, and thoughtful participation)
- 2 Satisfactory (some participation)
- 1 Needs Improvement (little or no participation)

Activity	Rating	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enough questions (e.g., 5-10) have been generated to begin inquiry 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the questions are specific enough to guide research 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several different aspects of the topic are indicated 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a list of key terms for search purposes is generated 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • search terms indicate appropriate aspects of the topic 		





Assessment Instrument

Locating Print and Online Resources

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 3 Excellent (frequent, regular, and thoughtful use)
- 2 Satisfactory (some participation)
- 1 Needs Improvement (little or no participation)

Activity	Rating	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least three different types of print resources were located 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the resources located were appropriate for the topic 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed ability to locate print resources using the catalogue system 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed knowledge of location of various print resources in the library 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed ability to use more than one search engine 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used appropriate search techniques to search topics online 		





Assessment Instrument **Navigating Print Resources**

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 3 Excellent (frequent, regular, and thoughtful participation)
- 2 Satisfactory (some participation)
- 1 Needs Improvement (little or no participation)

Activity	Rating	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to use a print dictionary 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to use a print encyclopedia 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to use the index of an encyclopedia 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to use the table of contents of a book 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to use the index of a book 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows ability to find relevant information in a print resource 		





Assessment Instrument **Use of Online Resources**

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 3 Excellent (frequent, regular, and thoughtful participation)
- 2 Satisfactory (some participation)
- 1 Needs Improvement (little or no participation)

Activity	Rating	Comments
• shows ability to use more than one search engine		
• shows ability to use an online dictionary		
• shows ability to use an online encyclopedia		
• shows ability to use a refined search on a search engine		
• shows ability to use a database		
• shows ability to use a specified web site and find information within it		
• shows ability to extract relevant information from a web site		





Assessment Instrument
Assessing Reliability of a Resource

Name: _____ Date: _____

Rating (0-3)	Criteria—To what extent does the student
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the author of a resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the credentials of an author
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the source of an item of information
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulate the reliability of a resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose reliable sources of information
<p>Comments:</p>	

Key: 3–excellent, 2–satisfactory, 1–needs improvement, 0–not evident





Assessment Instrument

Taking Notes to Avoid Plagiarism

Name: _____ Date: _____

Rating (0-3)	Criteria — To what extent does the student
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take notes appropriate to the topic
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use original words and phrases, not copied from the resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a minimum of sentences directly from the resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify correctly any material copied directly from the resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use notes from a variety of resources
<p>Comments:</p>	

Key: **3**–excellent, **2**–satisfactory, **1**–needs improvement, **0**–not evident





Assessment Instrument

Works Cited for an Essay

Name: _____ Date: _____

Key: 1 = Not Yet within Expectations, 2 = Meets Expectations (Minimal Level),
3 = Fully Meets Expectations, 4 = Exceeds Expectations

Criteria	Self-Assessment	Teacher Assessment	Teacher Comments
• Proper form of title is used for page			
• A minimum of three sources are used			
• A variety of types of sources are used			
• Correct format for each source is used			
• Sources are listed in alphabetical order			

Additional teacher comments:

