Conducting Research with Primary Sources
(or Just)
Conducting Research

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Agenda

- How do I *do research*?
- What questions should I ask when developing my research topic?
- How do I evaluate books and articles for use in my research paper?
How to *Do Research*...& the Scientific Method

- Define a topic *(State the Problem)*
- Develop Keywords for searching in library catalog (people, places, events)
  - consider different angles and Access Points from a range of different sources
    - people, places, organizations and events that relate to your topic
- Browse/search library website, catalogs using keywords
- Develop a question about that topic *(Hypothesis)*
- Read secondary sources first (Books and Journal Articles)
- Critical thinking/Evaluation of claims about topic *(Experiment)*
  - Outline & Write paper *(Conclusion)*

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Research – Where do I begin?

- One resource leads to another
  - Read the footnotes/endnotes first
  - These are the ingredients that created this dish...or article/book

- One book leads to another

- One article leads to another
Asking Questions = Critical Thinking/Analysis

- Critical Thinking
  - Analyzing your topic to develop a new understanding worthy of research
  - How does the literature shed light on the problem?
  - How does the problem bring to life the literature? (what other perspectives should I review on this topics?)
Asking Questions = Critical Thinking/Analysis

- Note Making or Interpreting what you read
  - How does the author’s purpose relate to yours?
  - How does the author’s thesis relate to yours? (same, opposite, or nuanced?)
  - How does the author’s evidence relate to yours?
Evaluation of Resources

Be as skeptical of resources as you are of food!

Example:

- Imagine yourself at lunch, it is 12:45PM, there is a tuna fish sandwich sitting at a buffet table...
  - What do you want to know about the sandwich before you decide to eat it?

Additional Questions worth asking about resources

- [http://www.pulaskitech.edu/library/content/source_evaluation_checklist.pdf](http://www.pulaskitech.edu/library/content/source_evaluation_checklist.pdf)
When Evaluating Resources Ask These Questions...

- **Author/Creator** - Where does it come from? Who wrote it? What kind of reputation does this author have?
- **Perspective/Bias** - What is their perspective on the topic? Bias?
- **Context** - time, date and current events of the time
- **Thesis**: Always read a secondary source from the outside in
- **Structure**: First read and think about the title -- what does it promise for the book or article?
- **Resources**: Read the footnotes! They are the nuts and bolts of history writing. When you come across a particularly interesting or controversial passage, watch to see what is cited. What primary sources has the historian used? Have they been used effectively? Are her sources credible or reliable? How does the use of the sources influence the kinds of arguments made? What other sources might have been used?

- Kara’s Take...
- Think like a journalist!
- Begin to pull together an argument or thesis
- Then ask yourself: Why is this important to my research?
Both are happening at the same time.
Must know where you are headed with your, what are the probable conclusions?
Must be constantly narrowing your focus as you continue to read and reflect on the resources
What about Analysis of Digital Objects and Websites?

- Process of evaluation is much the same as for books & articles
- Additional Questions for Digital Objects and Websites
  - Reputable institution?
  - Quality of the metadata? (ideally, developed by creator and matched with the archivist’s standard elements, plus details about the digitization process by the digital archivist.
  - Question what makes it authentic? Markings? Handwriting? Date?

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Research – Tools

- Get Organized w/Mindmap and Outlining Tools
  - https://www.mindmup.com/#m:new
  - http://mindnode.com/ (MAC OS Compatible)

- Outlines
  - https://www.theoutlinerofgiants.com/outliners

- Citation Managers
  - RefWorks (free through BU), Zotero, and EndNote (online or software)
Secondary Sources

Secondary sources interpret or analyze an event or subject. Examples of secondary sources are biographies and journal articles written well after the event or time period under investigation.

BU Libraries Website

These include

- dictionaries
- encyclopedias
- textbooks
- books and articles that interpret or review research works.
Primary Sources

Archives hold mostly primary sources

Primary sources are materials that provide direct evidence or firsthand testimony concerning the period or subject under investigation.

BU Libraries Website
Examples of Primary Sources

- Diaries
- Journals
- Speeches
- Interviews
- Letters
- Memos
- Manuscripts
- Memoirs
- Autobiographies

- Minutes
- Reports
- Licenses
- Photographs
- Sound recordings
- Drawings
- Scrapbooks
- Artifacts
Stuck?

- When in doubt....ask?
- Studies and surveys show that a conversation with a librarian (or archivist...that’s me) will help.
Copyright & Fair Use

- Copyright term and Public Domain in U.S.
  - [https://copyright.cornell.edu/resources/publicdomain.cfm](https://copyright.cornell.edu/resources/publicdomain.cfm)

- Code of Best Practices in Fair Use
    - 4 tenets of fair use are
      - Effect on the commercial market
      - Amount of work used
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