Special Edition
C21
ENGLISH FOR THE 21st CENTURY
B1 Pre-intermediate / B1+ Intermediate

Factsheet

Research (1)

Basics

Finding useful and reliable information is a fundamental study skill. Research allows you to expand your general knowledge of a topic with facts, statistics and expert opinions. It allows you to develop your overall understanding of the topic and helps you begin to form your own evidence-based opinions.

In the 21st century, many people grow up using the internet to find information that they need for their everyday life. Therefore, the internet is also often the first place that students go when doing research for assignments. This ***Factsheet*** will focus on online research, while the material on ***Research (2)*** will focus on academic books and journals, and using library resources.

The academic context

We have seen how brainstorming and mind-mapping are very helpful when preparing for an academic essay or assignment (see ***Brainstorm***). Researching your ideas is the next stage in this process. Once you have all of your ideas mapped out, it is time to start researching each of them, to find evidence and expert opinions to back up your arguments.

In higher education, you need to be able to research other people's ideas and gather resources in order to support your arguments in seminars, presentations and written assignments. Many students find research difficult because they are unsure about how to find good information online, or they don't have a good system for keeping track of their research so that they can refer to it later.

Key features

- When conducting online research, you will need to use a search engine. Most people use Google – indeed, *to Google* has become a verb in everyday English, meaning *to search online*.
- When you are researching for a written assignment, refer to your mind map and decide on which topics to research. Decide on the best keywords to use in your search, and the order in which you are going to search for them.
- The most important thing when surfing the internet for information is to keep track of your reading, and to note down your sources for referring to later. Creating a grid such as the one below is an excellent way of doing this:

Link	Author	Title	Date posted	Date accessed
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46749232	A. Therrien & J. Wakefield	Worry less about children's screen use, parents told	4 January 2019	26 January 2019
Summary (≤20 words)	Recent research indicates that overuse of social media, and screen time generally, is less damaging to children than previously thought.			

- By copying and pasting the link, you make sure that you'll be able to access the article again later. Keep your summary short (less than 20 words if possible), and summarize only the part of the article that is relevant to your assignment. You may wish to colour-code your research grid to reflect the colours you used on your mind map.
- By the end of your research session, you will have an easy-to-use document, with all the information you need for your assignment at your fingertips.

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Theory to practice

Tamsin is looking for articles about the positive aspects of social media. Look at her research grid entry and do the tasks below.

Link	Author	Title	Date posted	Date accessed
https://curatti.com/social-media-positive-effects/	V. Sherma	8 ways that social media is effecting us positively	14 March 2017	8 February 2016
Summary (≤20 words)	This website discusses 7 of the ways that social media is affecting our lives in positive ways.			

1 **Find four mistakes.**
2 **Answer these questions:**

- Is the website useful for Tamsin?
- Would you trust the website? Why? / Why not?

Challenges / difficulties

There is a vast amount of information on the internet, and anyone can post anything they want on many websites. There is no review or screening process. Websites like *Wikipedia* can be edited by anyone, which means the information may not always be 100% correct. Therefore, a key skill is learning to assess the reliability and usefulness of a website.

If you don't use the correct keywords for a search, the results will not be useful. Knowing how to choose the best keywords is a skill and requires practice.

How can I develop this skill?

Make a habit of researching things on the internet – even topics that are not linked to your academic study. Develop your own grid for keeping a record of research.

Learning outcome

Students who become skilled at online research are able to back up their arguments with evidence from a range of reliable sources. They can refer to a wide range of opinions on any given topic, demonstrate both sides of an argument and then form an opinion themselves.

When they have learnt this skill, students should feel comfortable with the process of searching for specific information online, evaluating the websites that they find and recording their research in a retrievable way.

Ways to get more practice

You will be required to conduct research throughout your academic career, whenever you do an assignment. Therefore, it will be very helpful for you to have a set process that you can turn into a study habit. It is a good idea to create a document on your computer called 'research grid' for you to use whenever you need to do some research.

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