

## **Project literature – Find and use the professional literature in the right way**

This instruction is written as help for students who are proceeding to write a major project. However, everyone who needs to get thorough and systematic knowledge on a technical subject, can probably benefit from the instruction.

### **1. Identify the subject**

It is important that you have clearly defined the problem for the project from the beginning. What do you want to know? Formulate the task as one or several questions. If e.g. you are to dimension a desulphurisation plant the question could be: " How do you desulphurise 1000m<sup>3</sup> flue gas from coal burning with as little load of the environment as possible?". Identify the important terms and keywords, these are emphasised in the examples. It is difficult to find relevant information if you do not quite know what you seek. As you go you can adjust your problem formulation according to need.

### **2. Find background information**

Look up your keywords in textbooks, handbooks, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Thus your subject is put into a technical connection. Do you know the right technical terms?

Note the relevant expressions, sub-subjects and references.

### **3. Use book databases to look for technical books**

Books are excellent at providing a general idea and for thorough introduction to the wide knowledge. Use subject search or free text search. Watch out for limiting the search too early – start with a wide search, see which subject words that are tied to relevant books, repeat the search with these subject words. Some books give a total view of one subject others go in depth with a single aspect. Evaluate which type you need – and how many! Note the bibliographical data of the book (title, author etc.) and placing at the library. Always start your search by looking in the local database. With the library link collection you can find other library databases. E.g. Bibliotek.dk (database of all libraries in Denmark).

### **4. Use databases with periodicals to search for technical articles**

The newest and most specialised information can always be found in technical articles. Periodicals are good for more specific subjects and for the new knowledge within an area. Newspaper articles are good for actual issues, information on companies and on the social debate. From the library link collection you have access to periodical databases of articles in Danish and foreign periodicals. This is especially the case with scientific research articles but it is also possible to search for news articles and popular scientific articles. You can search on author, title and subject words in all databases. Many databases also give a

summary (abstract) of the contents of the article and some of the articles are found in full text.

## 5. Find sources on the Internet

Material from the Internet is of a very fluctuating quality and it requires certain background knowledge to decide whether the found material is useable. The Internet should therefore be the last and not the first place to look. Always check out who is behind a given home page and when it was last updated. You might risk that information from the net are untrue or antiquated no matter from where it stems.

You should check the author's credibility before you accept the statements. All in all you should be attentive to the fact that www-documents most often are not subject to an editorial or collegiate quality evaluation. Use the library link collection: [www.viauc.dk/bibliotekhorsens](http://www.viauc.dk/bibliotekhorsens) is indexed after subject, for your searches. Use some of the search machines, databases and technical portals we have chosen to find each link.

**Technical portals** are good for a structured and quality evaluated access within a certain subject area. E.g. Euromonitor (Economics / Management).

**Search machines** are good at the quite new things and for information on organisations, companies and persons, e.g. Google (Search the Internet).

**Fact bases** are good work of references within company information, statistics and dictionaries. E.g. Kompass (Company information).

## 6. Evaluate what you have found

If you have found too many or too few sources, you must either narrow or expand your search terms. Try with alternative words/synonyms. You should always think critically. Already while you search you can contemplate the technical background of the author (attached to an educational institution, company or similar) and experience (has the author written much on the subject, does other authors refer to the author in question as a specialist?) and on the year of publication of the document (some technical areas change fast, information becomes antiquated), based on the information in the book or periodical databases. In books you should notice the edition (a book that is found in many editions is often a work of standard within the area, read the latest edition) and the publishing house (university publishing house or technical companies indicate a high professional level, books from a popular publishing house can be more easy accessible but might not go into depth).

When you have a document in your hand you should look at the table of contents and/or references. Is this source relevant to your subject? Does the text seem logical and cohesive? Is it worth your while to read it? In heavy books you might only need a couple of the chapters.

## **7. Use a recognized format for your list of literature**

In your project report it should be evident which literature you have used. Partly it shall be possible for others to prove your information and partly a list of literature is our documentation for a professional work with the available literature within the subject.

Ask your teacher, which format to use.

Based on: Engle, M. (20/05/2003). The Seven Steps of the Research Process (online).

Available: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill1.htm>