Cheat Sheet Module 10

Essential Concepts

Research

- **Research begins with a knowledge gap and a focused question**: True research starts when you identify something you don't yet know and formulate a question that requires exploration and analysis, not just a quick lookup.
- **Research writing constructs an answer from evidence**: Unlike source-based writing, which starts with a thesis and finds sources to support it, research writing develops a thesis *from* the evidence gathered in response to the research question.
- **The research process is iterative, not linear**: While there are logical steps—defining a topic, narrowing it, gathering background info, crafting a research question, developing a thesis, finding and citing sources, and writing—the process involves ongoing revision. You'll often revisit and refine earlier steps as you learn more, making early drafting and continual adjustment essential to developing a strong, well-supported paper.
- **Different research papers serve different purposes**: Analytic papers explore and evaluate issues without arguing a position, while argumentative papers take a stance and support it with evidence, both requiring distinct rhetorical strategies.
- **Narrowing a topic means refining a broad subject step by step until it becomes focused and researchable**: Start with a general area, explore subtopics, and use background research to identify a specific angle you can analyze in depth—good narrowing questions typically begin with how, why, or what—encouraging analysis and deeper understanding.

Finding Sources

- **Use keywords, not full questions, when searching.** Typing your whole research question into a search engine leads to vague results. Instead, extract the most important terms and use them strategically to find targeted, relevant information.
- **Pair Google Scholar with library databases for better results.** While Google Scholar offers access to many academic sources, library databases provide advanced filters, subject-specific search tools, and guaranteed access to peer-reviewed content—making them more reliable for scholarly work.

- **Distinguish between scholarly and peer-reviewed sources.** Not all scholarly articles are peer-reviewed. Peer-reviewed sources go through a rigorous evaluation by experts, ensuring higher academic credibility and making them the preferred choice for formal research.
- **Read scholarly articles strategically by knowing their structure.** Understanding the typical layout—abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, results, and conclusion—helps you quickly identify whether the article is useful and where to find the information you need.
- **Know when to use primary vs. secondary sources.** Primary sources offer direct, original data or firsthand accounts, while secondary sources interpret or analyze those events. Each plays a different role depending on the goals of your research.
- **Search library catalogs for books and databases for articles.** Library catalogs help locate physical or digital books using call numbers and subjects, while article databases allow you to search within journals and retrieve scholarly articles across specific disciplines.
- **Use database search tools and Boolean logic to refine results.** Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), quotation marks, and built-in filters like publication date and peer-reviewed-only help you control your search and reduce irrelevant or overly broad results.

Source Analysis

- **Use critical questions to assess a source's value.** Ask who wrote the source, what kind of material it is, when it was created, where it was published, why it exists, and how it's presented—this process helps you evaluate both its trustworthiness and usefulness for your research.
- **Suitability and trustworthiness are separate but essential.** A source must be relevant to your research question (suitable) *and* credible (trustworthy). A source can be appropriate in content but unreliable in accuracy, or reliable but irrelevant to your topic. You should also check whether the author has subject-area expertise, such as academic credentials or professional experience. Avoid relying on opinions from individuals outside their domain of expertise.
- **Apply the CRAAP method to evaluate sources effectively.** The CRAAP acronym—Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose—helps assess a source's credibility and relevance by examining its publication date, author qualifications, factual integrity, and intended audience or bias.
- **Use the Four Moves to verify online information.** When dealing with digital content, STOP before using it, INVESTIGATE the source's background, FIND better or corroborating coverage, and TRACE claims back to the original context to avoid misinformation.
- **Annotated bibliographies help you track and evaluate sources.** Creating an annotated bibliography lets you summarize, assess, and plan how to use each source. This helps

with staying organized, avoiding weak sources, and aligning sources with your research goals.

- **Literature reviews synthesize existing scholarship to frame your research.** A literature review identifies major findings, debates, and gaps in existing research. It helps you build on current knowledge without duplicating it and places your research within a broader academic conversation.

Glossary

annotated bibliography

a list of sources that includes full citation details along with brief notes summarizing, evaluating, and explaining how each source will be used in a research project

CRAAP method

a source evaluation strategy that stands for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose—used to assess the credibility and usefulness of information for research purposes

database

a broad research tool that includes a wide range of sources and subjects, often used for exploring topics across disciplines. examples include Google Scholar, JSTOR, and library article searches

Four Moves

a fact-checking strategy for evaluating online information: stop, investigate the source, find better coverage, and trace claims to their original context to assess accuracy and credibility

Google Scholar

an academic search engine by Google that indexes scholarly literature from academic publishers, universities, professional organizations, and government websites. it provides broad access to research sources but should be supplemented with library databases for comprehensive results

homework questions

fact-based questions that can be answered quickly through a single source without interpretation, analysis, or synthesis of information

key terms

important words or phrases related to a research topic that help locate relevant sources during a search. effective key terms appear frequently in articles and abstracts and may require using synonyms or related terms to improve results

literature review

a summary and evaluation of existing research on a specific topic that identifies major perspectives, key studies, and gaps in knowledge to inform future research or establish context for a project

popular sources

articles written for a general audience, typically found in newspapers and magazines. they are often written by journalists or staff writers, widely accessible, and designed to inform or entertain rather than provide in-depth analysis

primary source

an original, first-hand account or direct evidence of an event, topic, or research study. examples include diaries, interviews, speeches, photographs, and original research reports

research

a process of investigating a knowledge gap by gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information to develop new understanding or solve a complex question

research questions

questions that cannot be answered by a single fact or source and require analysis, comparison, and critical thinking to develop a meaningful response

research writing

a form of writing that begins with a genuine question and develops a thesis through gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information; it presents the writer's answer supported by evidence, reasoning, and sources

scholarly sources

articles written by experts or researchers, published in academic journals, and intended for students, scholars, and professionals. they present original research, analysis, or theory and include citations to support claims

secondary source

a work that analyzes, interprets, or summarizes information from primary or other secondary sources. examples include biographies, scholarly journal articles, and academic books

specialized database (research or library database)

a targeted research tool focused on specific subjects, formats, or date ranges, offering more relevant and refined search results than general databases. often used for in-depth academic research in a particular field

suitability

how well a source fits the purpose of your research, including its relevance, clarity, depth, and usefulness in addressing your research question

tertiary source

a resource that compiles and summarizes information from primary and secondary sources, often for quick reference or general overview. examples include encyclopedias, dictionaries, and fact books

trustworthiness

the reliability and credibility of a source, based on the author's expertise, accuracy of the information, and lack of bias