SECTION 2

Selecting information sources

2. SELECTING INFORMATION SOURCES

2.1. Introduction

Once the subject has been analyzed and defined, the best sources of information must be selected for the literature search. There are two dimensions to this process:

- The type of documents sought: monographs, journal articles, theses, etc.
- The type of resources to be searched: library catalogs, databases, Web search engines, specialized portals, etc.

2.2. Types of documents

This depends on the level and nature of the information required:

- Dictionaries and encyclopedias, useful for understanding the subject and clarifying it, especially when dealing with new concepts.
- Books or monographs, useful for further research. This category includes:
  - Manuals, which focus on a specific issue.
  - Mementos, for a quick overview of a subject.
  - Precis, which explore a particular aspect of the issue in greater depth.
  - Conferences proceedings.
- General or specialist periodicals: these keep you up to date with the latest research findings or current issues in society.
- Theses, dissertations, research reports (grey literature): of a high scientific level, they are appropriate for dealing with a specific subject.
- Specific documents (maps, patents, images, statistical data, etc.): their use will depend on the subject area or the approach chosen to deal with a topic.
- Official documentation: all official documents published by the State (laws, decrees, regulations, public contracts, associations, etc.).

2.3. Types of resources

This depends on the nature of the subject and types of document required:

2.3.1. Library catalogues

They are essential for finding paper documentation.

- World catalogue (http://www.worldcat.org/)

- Collective catalogue of Algeria (https://www.ccdz.cerist.dz)..
- The National Library catalogue (http://catalogue.bnf.fr)
- The catalogue of the central library of the University of Jijel (http://bc.univ-jijel.dz/opac).
- The catalogue of the library of the Faculty of Science and Technology at the University of Jijel (http://bc.univ-jijel.dz/opac-st).

2.3.2. Bibliographical databases

They consist of a structured set of bibliographic references on a subject, a field, a type of document, etc. They may contain an analysis, a summary and, often, an access to the full text of the document itself.

- Multidisciplinary databases: e.g. Jstor, DOAJ, Web of knowledge
- Specialized databases: e.g. Lexis Nexis, Doctrinal, Econlit, Business Source, ArXiv.org (mathematics and physics)
- With access to the full text of the document: e.g. Cairn, Jstor, Persée, Econlit, Thèses.fr
- Without access or with partial access to the text: e.g. Periodic, Francis, Pascal

2.3.3. Factual databases

They deliver information that can be used directly by the user. e.g. Maitron, Kompass, etc.

2.3.4. Corpus of texts

They bring together thematic or historical collections of texts. E.g. Brepolis, Classiques Garnier, EEBO, etc.

2.3.5. Web resources

They are innumerable, but their quality is extremely variable and information is volatile. Here are some recommended sites for scientific and academic information, classified by category:

- **Specialised search engines**
  - Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.fr/)
  - Google Books (http://books.google.fr/)
  - Economics Search Engine (http://ese.rfe.org/)
  - Scirus (http://www.scirus.com/)

- Isidore (http://www.rechercheisidore.fr/)
- Theses.fr (http://www.theses.fr/)

- **A directory of websites**

Open Directory Project (http://www.dmoz.org/World/Fran%C3%A7ais/), Created in 1998, it is managed by a large community of volunteer editors from all over the world.

- **Scientific or thematic portals**
  - World Wide Science (http://worldwidescience.org)
  - Université en ligne (http://uel.unisciel.fr)
  - Sciences.gouv.fr (http://www.science.gouv.fr/)
  - Legifrance (http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/)
  - International Scientific Research Centre (http://www.cirs.fr)

2.4. Assessing the quality and relevance of information sources

2.4.1. Why evaluate your sources?

Research work must be based on reliable information. Any information whose source is unknown should be discarded.

2.4.2. What are the main criteria for the reliability of sources?

- The author and publisher of the resource
- The date of publication of the document
- The domain of the resource (URL address)
- The purpose of the site
- Notoriety, popularity index of the site
- Information content (structure, arguments, sources, etc.).

2.4.3. Selecting documents

Documents must be selected not only for their quality but also for their relevance to the task in hand. To do this, the following elements need to be analyzed:

- **Document title**: for a book, look at the title on the title page.
- **Abstract:** It can be found in most bibliographic records taken from databases, at the beginning or end of periodical articles and often on the back cover of books.

- **Table of contents:** this helps you to appreciate the content (plan and logic of the argument) and to identify the chapters that may be relevant.
- **Tables, graphs, etc.:** They can help you to understand the subject and can be useful for your work.
- **Nature of the document:** determine whether it is an educational, research or popularization document.
- **Introduction and conclusion:** consulting these helps to identify the initial question and the conclusions the author draws from it