

## How to Find Background Information

A good way to begin your research is to **locate and read articles (or book chapters)** that will give you a **broad overview** of a topic. You can find background articles in a variety of reference materials—books, encyclopedias, journals and magazines. Also, these resources often provide **bibliographies**—lists of books and articles that will allow you to discover what else is available on a subject. These bibliographies can also provide additional resources for your research.

**Research Tip:** Once you've settled on a subject area for your extended essay, it's a good idea to keep copies of all the articles that you read. First of all, having a copy—whether its printed from a periodical database or the Internet or photocopied from a print resource—will allow you to highlight as you read and give you a place to make notations in the margins. Whenever you make a copy of an article or chapter in a book, make sure you have page numbers and all reference documentation that you'll need for a works cited page. You never want to go back and reconstruct a reference citation after the fact. It is too difficult and time consuming and often like trying to find a needle in a haystack!

### Sources for Locating Background Information

Until we visit Oakland University, your best bets are to go online and to your local library. Below are options available to you. I will go over these in much more detail at my optional lunch meetings for students, which I highly recommend you attend. There, you will see me visit these sites, practice searches with sample topics, show you how to navigate these, and perform effective Boolean searches. Here is the list:

1. Wikipedia is both a terrible source of information and a good resource. Here's how to use it responsibly. Type in your subject matter and ignore everything that's written on the page as the writer of the page is not an expert. Scroll to the bottom where the legitimate sources are all listed that were referenced to write the page by the actual academic scholars. As you peruse the titles, copy and paste into a document that you save. When we visit Oakland or if you go to a public library, try to get your hands on these sources, or go online and see if you can get the full text. On the Wikipedia page, you may even be lucky enough to find the link there that has the entire document. Voila!

2. Go to the following site: <http://lii.org/pub/topic/reference>. The links won't be helpful, but use the search, which is helpful, even though you cannot Boolean search (more on this later). Play with the settings and try to find some general information that may be useful to you. If this isn't helpful, you're be much more successful using...

3. Gale Group! Here's the catch: you have to be at school to use this. At home, you won't be able to access it. It's the homepage on every computer in the district, or do the following:

A. Google "Utica Learning Interchange."

B. Click on "Media Centers," then "Secondary," then "Gale Group."

Now, you have a powerful resource to search using a wide combination of sources. Unclick or click ones you want to use or not, depending on the description. Do a search. If too many returns, narrow the number of academic search engines based on your subject.

4. Go to Gale Group. Now click specifically on "General One File." Go to Advanced Search. Where you can enter multiple keywords is called a Boolean search. This allows you to narrow to exactly what you want to find. If not successful at first, don't get frustrated. You're probably using the wrong search words and phrases. This takes some discipline. Keep searching until you uncover what you need.

(see next page)

#### General Rules:

1. Search engines are lousy; they do not filter by authenticity. Avoid using them. If necessary, use [googlescholar.org](https://scholar.google.com).
2. If you don't find what you're looking for in the first 20 hits on a particular search of key words, start again.
3. Copy and paste relevant bibliography info. You may not come across it later. There's no harm in saving lots of info.
4. **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, use the Keyword search handout (see handout on website). When you exhaust a particular search combination, cross it out to know that you've exhausted it but can still see it. This way, you don't begin research tomorrow and forget what word/phrase combinations you've searched. You move on to another similar word.