Welcome! Come explore the Research Pyramid and sharpen your research skills!

When it’s time to research a topic, it’s usually a good idea to go from general to specific – from broad to narrow – in both search terms and in resources used. Here’s why:

When you build a house (or a pyramid), you don’t start with the roof, then the first floor, then the second and finally the foundation. No, you start with the foundation and build up from the ground. Without a solid foundation, the building is not trustworthy. Similarly, with research, you need to begin by getting a good “grounding” in your topic. That is, you need to get to know generally accepted facts about your topic.

Almost always, the best first choice in research is the general encyclopedia. From the encyclopedia, you’ll get names, dates, issues, controversies, terminology, and ideas for further research. Please view the presentation “First Things First” for more information on using general encyclopedias.

Once you have used the general encyclopedias, it’s smart to look for subject specific encyclopedias and other reference books. Lee College has access to a number of scholarly subject encyclopedias that can provide excellent information for your research.

After using the reference books, it’s time to go to regular books. Even the most current book is not “cutting edge.” It takes a significant amount of time and money to write and publish a book, so publishers are careful about what they invest in. Thus, books provide the next level of “accepted scholarship” for your topic.

At this point, you should look for articles from scholarly journals, and then from magazines and newspapers.

Finally, it’s time to check what many people would choose first: the Internet. Why should this be last? For one thing, it’s easy to put up a website. Practically anyone can do it in minutes. So, when you’re looking at a website, unless you already have a good understanding of your topic and the various issues relating to it, you will not have the ability to assess the accuracy or authority of the information found there.

Let’s look at some of the resources we might use if we were researching ART. We’ll look at samples of what we might find both in print within the Lee College Library and online through research databases provided by the Lee College Library. Only the final examples – the websites – will be available without the database subscriptions the library has provided for Lee College students.

- For general encyclopedias, we could use Encyclopedia Americana in print, OR WorldBook Online.
- For Subject encyclopedias, we could use the Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists or the The Grove encyclopedia of classical art and architecture in print, OR the Bridgeman Art Library
Archive or the Biographical Dictionary of Art online.

- For books, we could check out The Surreal Calder or The Menil Collection in print, OR Art in its Time or Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo online.
- For scholarly articles, we could read, for example, “Nothingness made visible: the case of Rothko’s paintings,” by Natalie Kosoi from Art Journal’s Summer 2005 issue online from a library database.
- For magazine or newspaper articles, we could read “Shake-up at the Menil” or “The art of letting go,” in print OR “Painting emptiness” or “African art at the Museum of Fine Arts” online – again from a library database.
- And, for World Wide Web, you might want to go to the website of the Menil Museum in Houston or that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

OK. You know that helpful material is available. But, how do you get to it? Well here’s how I found the items for this art assignment:

- General encyclopedias:
  - For print, use the online catalog. Or just go straight to the beginning of the reference collection, that’s where encyclopedias are located.
  - For the online ones, go to the library’s website, click on “Articles & E-Resources” and then select “Reference” from the Topic dropdown box. You can also get to them directly through links in the online catalog record.

- Subject encyclopedias:
  - For print, use the online catalog, search for your keyword and the word encyclopedia or the word dictionary. In this case, I searched for both combinations: art and dictionary, and art and encyclopedia.
  - For electronic, I chose the Credo database, which is listed under the “Reference” heading in “Research Databases.”

- Books:
  - For print books, I started with the online catalog and used a trick to find items more on topic for me.:
    - For The Surreal Caldo I entered “art” then from the Search by Field box, selected Subject. This forces the catalog to only look in for the word “art” in the Subject field of the catalog record.
    - For The Menil Collection, I entered “menil” then selected Title from the Search by Field box to require only items that have the word “menil” in their title.
  - For electronic books, I selected netLibrary from the Research Databases page. I got to it by clicking on the “Articles and E-Resources” link on the library’s homepage. You’ll find links to ebooks within the library’s online catalog, too. Either way you access them, you’ll log in using your MyLC username and password.
• Scholarly journals: First, please note that we show no examples from the Lee College print collection. While the library provides access to many scholarly art journals, they are all online. Often we’ll only have an article in one format rather than both print and electronic.
  o We found “Nothingness made visible” in the library database Academic Search Complete. We chose the limiters “Scholarly” and “Full Text” because we were off campus and the homework is due tomorrow. Normally, selecting “Full Text” is not a good idea because it prevents you from finding good material that we might have elsewhere OR could acquire on your behalf from another library. But, when the homework’s due tomorrow, it’s a reasonable choice. It’s good to know, though, that if we have the item in another database, there will be a link directly to it from the database that only has the citation. If you select Full Text, you’ll lose that link.

• Magazines and newspapers, whether print or electronic: start in a database because that’s where you find the citations to articles. (in this case, I used Academic Search Complete).

• To find reputable websites, it’s usually better to go to a trusted site where humans have found and listed sites for you. Libraries have been doing this as long as the web has existed. From the Lee Library website, try “Research Guides” under Research Tools to see if we have any suggested sites for your subject.

In this brief presentation, we’ve taken a look at the Research Pyramid. Remember to start general – or broad – and move to specific – or narrow – in your research and you will do well. With resources, this means starting with encyclopedias. With developing a search strategy...let’s talk about that another time! Look for tutorials from the Lee College Library to guide you through the process.

To learn more about how to search the library’s catalog or databases, check out our other tutorials! Don’t forget you can contact us whenever you need help. Wherever you are, we’re here to help you!