Communicator’s Tools (I): Documentation and web resources

Introduction

Communicator’s Tools (I) focuses on each step of the research process:

- to determine the kinds of research information you need for each scientific or technical project
- to locate and preview sources efficiently
- to evaluate the information you find
- to acknowledge the borrowed materials you use.

Since such a wealth of information is available and because new information appears so quickly, especially on the World Wide Web, research strategy and guides to information are more important for technical communicators than ever before.

When do communicators need research?

For some projects, you will already have the information that will meet your audience’s needs. However, because workplace products, situations, and equipment are constantly changing, you may need to update and supplement the information you already have.

The way you research a question and the way you present your answer are shaped by four factors outside the question itself:

- **Audience**: how you explain a subject depends on the needs of the audience and the way they will use the information.
- **Purpose**: the purpose of research, like the purpose of any communication project, is guided by your audience’s need for and use of the information you will provide. Audience’s needs will vary, even for the same information. For example, a report on toxic waste could help a company producing hazardous chemicals to find new solutions for toxic waste disposal. The same information could also be used in lawsuits against the chemical company.
- **Scope**: broad or narrow, the scope will depend on audience and purpose.
- **Prior knowledge:** What you already know will determine how much you need to learn through research. Whatever your topic may be, start by evaluating what you already know. Then determine how much additional information you will need to address the research question effectively.

**Beginning the search: early steps**

You have several ways to begin your search for sources and information, including:

- consulting an in-depth, authoritative overview in a specialized encyclopedia.
- Reading recent journal or magazine articles.
- Using a computer with access to one or more indexes to periodicals. Experiment with the different keywords that describe the topic.
- Surfing the web. Because anyone can post anything on the web, there is no ready filter to sift inaccurate or biased information from reliable information.

**Recording and tracing your steps**

The best way to keep track of where you are going in your research is to record where you have been. The list below describes the information to record for different kinds of sources:

**Books**
- author(s)
- editor(s)
- title of the book (for a book with chapters by different authors, keep a record of the author and title of the chapters you are using)
- publisher, place of publication and date published
- if the book is in electronic or nonprint format, list the format (audiotape, web site or other sources) in which the book appear.

**Journals and Magazines**
- author(s)
- title of the article
- title of the magazine
- volume and issue number
- date of issue (sometimes a month or season)
- page numbers on which the article appears
- if the article is in electronic format, the web address (URL) and the date on which you accessed it
- For full-text online databases, such as Lexis_Nexis Academic Universe, Dow-Jones, or Expanded Academic Index, the date
you found the database and the keywords or subject heading you used
- for data on CD-Rom, the dates covered by the disk

**Newspapers**
- author(s) if listed
- title of the article
- title of the newspaper
- volume and issue number
- date of issue (sometimes a month or season)
- page numbers on which the article appears

**Web pages**
- web address (UR)
- author (if listed)
- sponsor or host of the page
- date you accessed the page
- date on which the page was last updated

**Interviews**
- Interviewee’s full name and title
- Place, date and time of interview
- Records of follow –up letters, e-mails, or telephone calls that added information to the interview

**Information Sources**

Print and online materials are usually located using a systematic organized search of available sources. To begin research, you must first know how to use information sources efficiently. You can locate information by using library catalogs, print guides, electronic guides and public information.

**Using the library**

**Periodical Indexes**
- Business Periodicals Index
- Social Science Index
- Chemical Abstracts
- Expanded Academic Index
- Periodical Abstracts
- Readers’ Guide Abstracts
- General Periodical Index
- Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature
- Applied Science and Technology Index
- General Science Index
- Biological and Agricultural Index
- Engineering Index Monthly
- Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
**Figure 1:** Library catalogs and data bases (UA)

**Figure 2:** Network of Universities’ Libraries
ACTUALIZACIÓN DEL FICHERO DE CONEXIÓN VÍA WEB:
Se han detectado ciertos problemas con los anteriores conectores de Metaframe. Además, si tiene problemas con la ejecución del conector, pruebe a instalarlo previamente.
Para descargar la última versión pinche sobre alguno de los enlaces siguientes:

Windows con Explorer o Netscape  Windows con Mozilla  Windows con Firefox  Linux

**Figure 3: Electronic Databases**
Figure 4: Electronic Journals (UA)

Figure 5: Summaries database

Works cited and reference lists
APA: The majority of the employees in fast-food restaurants are 20 years of age or younger ("Fast Food," 1999, p. 6). In APA style the page number may be omitted for paraphrases.

References to Web pages and other electronic media may need to reflect sections rather than page numbers in the parenthetical reference.

**QUOTATION FROM A WEB PAGE**

MLA: Ralph Voss states that "the sensitivity of the Australian ecosystem to invasive plants and animals is thoughtfully reflected in the regulations governing transport of animal and agricultural products" (Intro).

APA: Ralph Voss (1999, December 21) states that "the sensitivity of the Australian ecosystem to invasive plants and animals is thoughtfully reflected in the regulations governing transport of animal and agricultural products" (Intro).

Paraphrase in MLA or APA format can include phrasing to indicate their source.

**PARAPHRASE**

MLA: In technical communication many professionals share the experiences of Megan Little, who in a 1999 e-mail message described the combined effectiveness of her academic training and the support she received from workplace mentors.

APA: In technical communication many professionals share the experiences of Megan Little (1999), who described in an e-mail message the combined effectiveness of her academic training and the support she received from workplace mentors.

**WORKS CITED AND REFERENCE LISTS**

In MLA and APA documentation, a list of works cited, or references, concludes a research report or publication. This list gives author, title, and publishing information for all source materials referred to in the text.

MLA and APA documentation share some conventions for preparing such a list. For both styles, the items in a works cited list are arranged in alphabetical order by the last name of the first listed author, or, if no author is listed, by the first important word in the title. ("A", "an", and "the" are not considered important words.) The first line in an MLA documentation entry is not indented; each turn line thereafter is indented. The first line in an APA entry is indented; turn lines are not indented. Data from a CD-ROM or a disk should be described in the same way as print information. However, the type of media should also appear after the name of the source (for example: *Times Herald-Record*, CD-ROM).

Although documentation styles differ, they differ only in such details as capitalization of titles, punctuation, abbreviations, and order of information. All documentation styles give the essential information for locating a particular source. A discussion of MLA and APA conventions for citations (with examples to illustrate each style) follows.

**Citation Conventions: MLA**

Listings for books, articles, and electronic sources require a particular order and punctuation in an MLA works cited list.

For books:

- last name, first name of author
- title of book
- city of publication
- name of publisher
- year of publication

**EXAMPLE**


For articles in magazines:

- last name, first name of author (if an author is listed)
- title of article
- name of magazine or journal
- date of issue
- page numbers

**EXAMPLE**


For electronic media:

- last name, first name of author (if an author is listed)
- title of document
- date of publication
- source
- date of access
- URL
Examples of MLA Citations
Below are examples of MLA citations for different kinds of references: books, periodicals, and nonprint materials.

Books
Books with one author:

Books with two or three authors:

Books with three or more authors:

Book with corporate author:

Book listed by editor:

Government document:

A work in an anthology:

Encyclopedia listing:

Articles
Article in a journal:

Article in a magazine:

Newspaper article:

Nonprint Media
Filmstrip, film, or videotape:

Computer program:

Web site:

E-mail:
Larkin, Mike. “Plant Parasite Infestations.” E-mail to the author. 21 Dec. 1999.

CD-ROM:

Interview:

For MLA citation conventions governing other types of sources, consult the MLA *Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the MLA Web page <http://www.mla.org>.

Citation Conventions: APA
Books, articles, and electronic sources require a particular order and punctuation in an APA reference list. Notice the conventions in order, punctuation, and capitalization of titles. The student research report, which appears on pages 565–578, uses APA citation format.
Examples of APA Citations

Below are examples of APA citations for different kinds of references: books, periodicals, and nonprint materials.

**Books**

Book with one author:


Book with two or more authors:


Book with corporate author:


Book listed by editor:


Government document:


Chapter or essay in an anthology:


Encyclopedia article:


**Articles**

Article in a journal:


Article in a magazine:


Newspaper article:


**Nonprint Media**

Filmstrip, film or videotape:

*Technical occupations [Videocassette]*. (1997). Boulder, CO: Delphi Pro-

For books:

- last name, first initial of first name of author
- year of publication
- title of book
- city and state of publication
- name of publisher

**EXAMPLE**


For articles in magazines:

- last name, first initial of first name of author (if an author is listed)
- year of issue
- title of article
- name of magazine, volume, number
- page numbers

**EXAMPLE**


For electronic media:

- last name, first initial of first name of author (if an author is listed)
- date of Internet publication
- title of document
- date of access
- URL

**EXAMPLE**

Computer program:


Specific document on a Web site:


E-mail:

In APA style, personal communications (including e-mail, telephone calls, and letters) are cited in text but not listed in the references.

CD-ROM:


Interview:

In APA style, personal interviews are cited in text but are not listed in the references.


Guidelines and instructions to authors:

- Aelfe: http://www.aelfe.org/?s=normes
- Science Magazine: http://www.sciencemag.org/about/authors/

**TASK 1: Web searches:**

a. Think about any information need of your field by means of natural language (for instance, “I want to collect a body of texts (i.e. corpus) in English of documents dealing with specialized texts on marine pollution, in .doc format, including the terms “marine” and “pollution” in title and body of text, and created by an authoritative source).

b. Represent your information need at the beginning of the exercise.

c. Specify this need by isolating each of the parameters which may be essential to obtain satisfactory results in your search.

d. Search using a directory (through categories) and using your preferred search engine (Google, Netscape, Altavista, Alltheweb…) (through simple or advanced search).

e. Compare results.

f. Go into the possibilities of a classic search engine (Google) and of an alternative engine (Scirus) in depth. Extend your searches using all the advance-search parameters.
g. Compare results of a classic search engine and of an alternative/scientific search engine.

**TASK 2: Quality assessment criteria**

a. Compare results obtained in Task 1 according to quality assessment criteria (authorship and source; content and coverage; updating and maintenance)

b. Additionally, you can consider other criteria pointed out by Sánchez-Gijón (2004: 33-34):

- authorship
- accuracy
- treatment of contents
- originality
- purpose
- links to other resources
- ergonomics
- computer environment
- citation
- receivership
- addressee