

Independent Learning Newsletter Tips

Internet Research

Do you waste hours on the Internet when you are researching for an assignment? Here are our top 10 tips to be more effective and efficient in your research.

1. **REQUIREMENTS:** Before you start, review all the info about the assignment carefully. What have you been asked to do? What are the main points or requirements? What guidelines or directions have you been given? Do you understand the task? Is there anything you need to ask your teacher about? Spend around 10 minutes on this. Highlight key words, try and paraphrase in your own words.
2. **BRAINSTORM:** You need to decide what you are going to research. Spend around 20 minutes on your initial brainstorm. Write a list of the different areas you will need to include in your assignment. For each section brainstorm topics or phrases that might help you narrow your research. Pay particular attention to any marking criteria you have been given. If you know absolutely nothing about the topic, you may like to spend 5-10 minutes in Wikipedia to give yourself a bit of background and overview. While many schools do not want you to use Wikipedia as a reference in your assignment (as it is not always a reliable or expert source to quote from) it is a good way to get an overview about the main points and to generate some thoughts on what you may need to research.
3. **PLAN:** You need to work out how much info you will need for each section of your assignment. There is no point collecting pages of information on a point if you only need to write a paragraph. Look at the word or page limit for the assignment. This may vary depending on the format of the task. For each section, work out roughly how much information you will need for that section and write this down on your brainstorm list. This should only take 10 minutes. You may also want to write your list of what you need to research, the key words or phrases and amount of info needed out again neatly so you can have it by you when you start your research on the computer.
4. **FEEDBACK:** Show someone your initial plan before you start researching. A parent, a sibling, your teacher – just get someone to have a quick look to make sure you haven't missed anything obvious or misinterpreted the assignment. They may also suggest other lines of enquiry for you to explore.
5. **BROADEN SEARCH:** Don't forget that there are other places to research apart from the internet! Libraries, books, magazines and newspapers. Your librarian might also know about certain databases you could access. You may know people who are experts on the topic. Don't always go straight to Google.

6. **INTERNET SEARCHES:** Many students waste a lot of time as they do not know what they are looking for! Well you have a plan, so you will start with the first item on your brainstormed list. Remember to put “exact phrases” in quotation marks. Try other search engines apart from Google as they may show different results.
7. **BE SELECTIVE:** When the search results appear on your screen, do not just click on the first link. Take a few moments to look at where the links are from (eg. National Geographic? A blog?). Think about which ones seem more likely to a) answer your assignment question and b) be from a reputable source (such as an expert or authority). Read the few lines of information underneath each link. Many students waste a lot of time as they just click at random. Make an assessment before clicking. You may also look at more than just the first page of results. Also assess your search terms. Did the search engine find the sorts of things you were looking for or should you modify your search terms before clicking on a link?
8. **ASSESSING INFORMATION:** When you find information that looks useful, you need to decide if the source is reputable. Who is the author and what are their credentials? What sort of organisation has created the site? Can you tell anything from the URL of the site? When was the site last updated? Who is the target audience of the site? Where has the information come from? These are just some of the questions you need to ask yourself when you are critically evaluating a website.
9. **RECORDING INFORMATION:** If you find information that is useful, you need to record this information. You have two main options. You could print out the information so you can highlight it. Or you can cut and paste the relevant information into a word document or a program or app like Evernote. If you take the second option, make sure you collate the information under your list of headings that you created when brainstorming.
10. **RECORDING REFERENCES:** If you print the information, make sure the following is on the page and if not then write onto the page: the title of the source, the author, the publisher, and place and date of publication. This is your preliminary, or draft, bibliography. If you are cutting and pasting into a program, make sure you also have this info and it is linked to the correct content! You will need this for your bibliography and to ensure that you do not plagiarise when you start writing your assignment.

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