Literature Search Tips

Below are a few suggestions for how to best find and cite literature, as well as how to differentiate different types of research.

PsycINFO or Google Scholar

You should be using PsycINFO through Evans Library to find your references. If you are not using this, I recommend Google Scholar (scholar.google.com), a user-friendly way to find great resources that are peer-reviewed. It will also put your selected citation into APA format if you select the quotations symbol under each article (located next to the star). If you choose to use this resource, make sure you select the APA format, and not MLA, Chicago, or any of the other citation formats. Remember that this formatting (for the reference section of a paper or other assignments) is different from the formatting that should be used for in-text citations!

Also, if you use Google Scholar, it's helpful to make your search term brief and specific. Since Google Scholar responds well to keywords, instead of typing in a question (such as "What effect does alcohol have on the brain?"), you could use keywords (such as "alcohol use" "brain functioning"). You could also choose to put quotations around your keywords to make sure that the articles will include the exact text you type in. (This probably won't work if you quote a whole question).

Acceptable Articles

Students often struggle to identify acceptable articles to cite. You must use peer-reviewed articles in all your assignments. As you will learn in your readings and lectures, these articles and the information in them have been reviewed by experts in the field. This means **no** popular press articles (such as *Psychology Today*, ABC News, Wikipedia or other encyclopedia pages, or other media outlets). The best way to avoid these types of references is to use PsycINFO through Evans Library, PubMed, or Google Scholar.

Empirical Versus Nonempirical (Theoretical) Articles

Students also struggle to differentiate between empirical and nonempirical articles. Basically, empirical articles contain either newly collected or newly analyzed data. These articles include experiments, surveys and other correlational designs, and meta-analyses. A good way to identify these articles is to look for sections of the manuscript titled "Methods" and "Results." These headings suggest that the authors have some reportable way of collecting and analyzing data. Empirical articles may also have a "Participants" section. This section typically tells the reader

how many participants are in the study, the ethnic/racial breakdown, the gender/sex breakdown (for example, 50 percent female and 50 percent male), and the ages of the participants. These are **great** indicators of an empirical article.

Nonempirical (theoretical) articles **do not** contain newly collected or analyzed data. Common examples include reviews, theory articles, and book chapters. These articles are **not** allowed for your assignments, though they might be helpful in learning about a specific topic.

I hope you find these suggestions helpful! As always, let's keep this an honest learning environment. If you have any concern about whether your activity (or the activity of another student) is considered plagiarism, please refer to the student handbook: http://www.fit.edu/studenthandbook/