

## **Guide to tackling your first assignment**

### **Introduction**

The Library is your knowledge partner and would like the opportunity to journey with you to achieve academic success. In subscribing to the belief that *Student academic success starts in the library*, we commit to providing conducive spaces and the most appropriate research support for an enriching learning experience.

### **Purpose of the guide**

This guide introduces you to the fundamentals for a hassle-free experience with your first assignment. The intention is to give you a sound grounding for more intensive research assignments that will come later. Irrespective of the complexity of your research assignments, the library provides the most appropriate information resources for that enriched life-long learning experience.

### **Objective of the guide**

We would like to provide you with uncomplicated guidelines as you tackle your introductory research assignments. It focuses on interpreting a reading list, developing search strategies using appropriate keywords, searching platforms to find relevant and authentic information resources and to accurately cite them to eliminate plagiarism.

*As your knowledge partner we would like to accompany you along your successful academic journey.*

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## **Let's go...**

It can be quite overwhelming to start any research assignment, but if it is broken down into smaller separate steps, it becomes more manageable and less daunting. This guide is meant to assist you with tackling your first assignment. It also provides the basics and sets the foundation for more complex assignments which require deep interrogation of library resources, including consultation with expert library staff. If this guide does not fulfil all your information needs for the first assignment, do not hesitate to explore the wide range of library guides ([accessible via the Library's website](#)) or [contact](#) the library staff.

As you begin to think about your assignment, consider how you find and evaluate your information. This guide walks you through the basics of what is called the *research process*, and how to find library resources to support your assignment.

## **Where do I start?**

Your lecturer will give you an assignment topic, possibly after covering the basics of the topic. The lecturer may provide a reading list with the expectation that you can start with this list and, if possible/necessary, add more readings when preparing for the assignment. The items on your reading list are reliable sources of information, which are relevant to your topic. In an alternate scenario, the lecturer may present a research topic without a reading list and expect you to find the relevant resources to answer the assignment.

Let's start with the first scenario where a reading list is provided and then follow that with the second scenario where you have to determine or identify your keywords and use these keywords to find the relevant resources.

### **Starting point *The Reading List* (scenario 1)**

The first thing that needs to be done is to [interpret a reading list](#) which will have, amongst others, references to books and journal articles. You need to be able to differentiate between a book and a journal article before you start with the assignment.

Here is what a typical citation or reference for a book looks like in the UCT Author-date referencing style:

Raju, R., Adam, A., Johnson, G., Miller, C. and Pietersen, J. 2015. *The quest for a deeper meaning of research support*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Libraries. DOI: 10.15641/0-7992-2522-8.

Author/s. Date of publication. *Title of the book*. Place of publication: Publisher. Digital object identifier (DOI). International standard book number (ISBN).

A typical article would read as follows:

Raju, R., Claassen, J., Adam, A., D'Angelo, A., Keraan, S., Mostert, N. and Vonk, S. 2018. Restructuring for relevance: a paradigm shift for academic libraries. *Library management*. 39 (6/7): 1-12. DOI: 10.1108/LM-06-2017-0062.

Author/s of the article. DoP. Title of article. Title of the journal, Volume (issue no.): page number. DOI

For more examples, you can consult the [UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard Referencing style](#).

For other referencing styles, please see this link: <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/lib/research/referencing>

### **Exploring your reading list**

Now that you can differentiate between the different information resource types (e.g., books and journal articles), you can now start your search. It is important to note that there are a substantial number of those references which will be in electronic format (e.g., e-books and journal articles). However, there will be references which will be in hardcopy (paper) format, and you will have to go to the library to borrow or photocopy. Please make sure that you follow copyright legislation (rules) when you are making photocopies.

### **Locating information resources**

You have your reading list, and you know how to read a reference. The next step is access to the information resources on the reading list. The search engine, [Google](#) is a quick and familiar way of finding information and can be a useful way to begin researching around a topic. However, you are strongly encouraged to use the library databases as they provide authentic research information. The University makes substantial investment to ensure that you have access to authentic information resources to assist you with your assignments. The lecturers will make attempts to ensure that the references in the reading list are accessible in the Library.

### **What about Google Scholar?**

[Google Scholar](#) works in a similar way to other search engines but searches for scholarly literature. Be that as it may, you will still need to carefully evaluate the information for relevance to your assignment.

### **Using the Library platform for your resources**

The Library has a platform (online catalogue) which you can browse to find relevant information resources. The platform is called Primo and you can use it to find all books and journals (in both formats; electronic and physical copies) held at UCT Libraries. For physical copies of material, Primo will give you the call number or shelf number (Dewey number e.g., 658.402 THE). This call number can be compared to the ‘street address’ of the book.

If you find any e-books when you are searching for information, you can click on the hyperlink to access the full text.

Many students browse the shelves initially to look for books on a topic. Books are shelved in number sequence using the ‘call number’ on the spine of the books. Books with similar content are grouped together which facilitates browsing.

### **Read critically and extract information relevant to your topic**

The first step is to thoroughly evaluate your information resources. Your success with academic writing depends upon how well you understand what you are doing as you write and then how you approach the assignment task. Hence, you need to read the consulted information resources critically and extract the most relevant information to support your assignment. It is important to understand that writing-up the assignment requires more than the ability to construct correct sentences or compose neatly organised paragraphs. Successful completion of an assignment requires that you utilise your research skills, your ability to read complex texts and responding critically to new information.

### **Plagiarism**

A good understanding of [plagiarism](#) is extremely important when writing up your assignment.

#### ***What is plagiarism?***

Plagiarism is the taking of another person's ideas, writings or inventions and using them as your own. This does not conform to good academic work. Re-wording/paraphrasing another person's work without citing the source is also considered plagiarism. One way to alleviate plagiarism is to reference all sources used.

#### ***What is referencing or citing?***

[Referencing](#) is the process of acknowledging the contribution of other writers and researchers in an academic piece of work. Any research assignment that draws on the ideas, words or research of other writers must be cited/acknowledged. There are two tiers of citing: firstly, in-text referencing and secondly, the creation of a list of references used.

***In-text citations*** – is when you refer to other people’s work in the text of your assignment. These citations appear in the main body of your assignment. It is very important to acknowledge the authors of the book/article that you used in your assignment, whether you have quoted from them directly or just referred to their research/ideas.

***Generating a reference list*** – you must ensure that you keep a record of all your sources you used or referred to in your assignment. At the end of the assignment, you will compile your reference list.

There are many citation styles – check what is the preferred style of your department. UCT generally uses the [UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard Referencing style.](#)

You are now ready to submit your assignment.

### **Developing and applying keywords (scenario 2)**

In scenario 2 (if you have not been given a reading list), you will need to develop a set of keywords and apply these keywords to a search process. The first step in this process is to understand your assignment topic. You need to have a good idea as to exactly what the topic requires. A good starting point in understanding the topic is accessing disciplinary reference material.

The Library makes available collections of [subject encyclopaedias and handbooks](#) that serves as a great source of background information on a variety of topics to start your research. This background reading sets a good foundation for the creation or identification of keywords.

### ***What are keywords?***

Keywords are words in your assignment topic that provide guidance on how to select or identify key concepts you will be looking at. You need to choose keywords and phrases that best describe that topic. Please remember to include synonyms, related terms and alternative spellings in your list.

Once you have developed your keyword list, you can now use these keywords to find the necessary information resources.

The [starting point](#) in the collection of the information resources is the library platform (Primo), library database and (if necessary) Google Scholar.

The steps hereafter is the same as Scenario 1.

### **Study spaces**

The library provides a safe (non-judgmental) and conducive study space. The library's extended hours provide students with plenty of time to complete their assignments.

### **Additional resources**

- Introduction to the virtual library service video

<https://media.uct.ac.za/engage/theodul/ui/core.html?id=61c76ea0-94ab-4b93-a25c-8f843d3c2731&ltimode=true>