

Information & Digital Literacy for University Success

Academic Skills for University Success Specialization

The University of Sydney Centre for English Teaching

Information types by field

English literature, Art History, Film Studies, Music Studies

Academics in these fields study the texts from the 'cultural record' – e.g. literature, pieces of art, films, and musical compositions – and engage with work from the 'scholarly record' to further understand, critique, and analyze the cultural/popular texts. Sometimes historical texts are drawn upon as well. At an undergraduate level, students learn about theories in the field from secondary sources that provide a vocabulary to analyze the texts from different perspectives (Gluibizzi, 2010, in Keeran, 2014).

Information types

Primary: Literature, artworks, films, musical compositions

Secondary: books, journal articles, reviews, official film websites

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, textbooks

(Baker, 2014; Keeran, 2014; Sampsel, 2014; Zauha, 2014)

Art, Film, and Music

Budding artists, filmmakers, and musicians are expected to build knowledge of movements in their field (Keeran, 2014). They draw upon pieces of art, films, and musical compositions to build their technical knowledge and for inspiration (Hemmig, 2008, 2009, in Keeran, 2014).

Information types

Primary: Artistic texts – works of art, films, recordings of performances, musical scores

Secondary: Books, journal articles, reviews

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, textbooks

History

Historians analyze historical texts in order to make sense of the past. They gather historical texts and read what others have said about them in order to develop an informed perspective (Ragain, 2014). The historical texts themselves are likely to be assigned to undergraduate students, though they may be asked to find them as well.

Information types

Primary: Historical texts – documents, artifacts, artworks, classical literature

Secondary: Books, journal articles, reviews, biographies

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, textbooks

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Philosophy

Philosophy is the study of the nature of aspects of life and human thought such as reality, knowledge, existence, and values. Philosophers ask and work on answering questions such as 'What is consciousness?', 'Does free will exist?', and 'How should we live?'. Undergraduates start by focusing on the historical origins and prior work in these areas, reading original work by key philosophers and discussing these ideas in seminars and essays. Sub-fields of philosophy include epistemology, metaphysics, political philosophy, logic, and philosophy of mathematics.

Information types

Primary: Historical writings (e.g. books), journal articles

Secondary: Analyses of original texts, journal articles

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, textbooks

Linguistics

Linguists analyze language to look at the underlying structures and patterns in language use. They do this by using analytical tools to uncover these initially hidden patterns. At an undergraduate level, students read textbooks that cover different aspects of language and society and ways of analyzing key features. They also may use recommended websites and tools to assist with this analysis. They also may begin to read journal articles that report findings of linguistic studies.

Information types

Primary: Data sets (e.g. word lists, written texts, transcripts of people speaking), journal articles

Secondary: Textbooks, websites

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, handbooks

Psychology

Psychology is the study of the human mind and behavior. It encompasses a wide range of sub-fields, such as clinical psychology, child psychology, counseling, and abnormal psychology, wherein researchers conduct studies to contribute findings to the field and practitioners (psychologists, counselors, etc.) work with patients. In all branches of psychology, whether they aim to become a researcher or a practitioner, undergraduate students need to understand key findings in the field historically and relevant current research.

Information types

Primary: Journal articles (note: from here onward, journal articles are primary sources because they are records of experiments and original studies), data, lab notes

Secondary: Textbooks, magazine articles, case studies

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, handbooks

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Education

Education students study teaching methods, classroom management (e.g. discipline), assessment and testing, and planning and programming of classes. There are two main types of classes: educational theory (incorporating studies from psychology, sociology, and anthropology) and teaching practice/curriculum design. As an undergraduate Education major, students can typically focus in the following areas: Early childhood education, Primary Education, or Secondary Education, majoring in Mathematics, Science, History, English, Physical Education, etc.

Information types

Primary sources: Activity books, journal articles, and case studies

Secondary sources: Textbooks, newspaper and magazine articles

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, handbooks

Sociology & Anthropology

The fields of sociology and anthropology both involve the study human social life. Sociology focuses on the systems and structures that drive human sociality, while anthropology focuses on studying the cultures, customs, and evolution of societies. First year courses provide an introduction and overview to the fields and key movements and theories, while later courses go into more depth with particular sub-fields and research methods.

Information types

Primary: Journal articles, data sets

Secondary: Books, textbooks

Tertiary: Handbooks, encyclopedias

Physics, Chemistry, Maths, Agriculture

At an undergraduate level, students in the sciences typically are involved with experimentation, laboratory research, simulation, fieldwork, mechanical drawing, and solving problem sets (Berman, 2014). This involves understanding key findings, theorems, and approaches and applying them to different kinds of problems.

Information types

Primary: Journal articles, data sets, lab notes, conference proceedings

Secondary: Books, textbooks, science periodicals

Tertiary: Encyclopedias

Engineering

Engineering students study the design, creation, and functionality of buildings, machines, software, and infrastructure. Sub-fields include civil engineering, mechanical engineering, software engineering, and chemical engineering. First year studies include subjects such as

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introduction to engineering, problem solving, maths, and physics. These courses involve problem sets based on real-world engineering problems, experimentation and simulations, and prototyping.

Information types

Primary: Conference literature, dissertations and theses, technical reports and gray literature, patents, scientific journals, subject-specific journals, case studies.

Secondary: Textbooks, technical standards and specifications, handbooks, subject-specific encyclopedias

Business, Marketing, Accounting, Economics

Business students study current business practices in order to prepare to work in a wide range of industries. Marketing looks at ways of engaging clients, while Accounting focusses on financial analyses essential to running a business. Economics is a broader field that examines systems and problem-solving, often related to finance and business.

Because Business focusses on current practice, “Business information is not primarily scholarly, but is created mainly to support commerce and investment” (Ragains, 2014, p. 292).

Information types

Primary: Datasets (e.g. stock market, audit trails, statistical datasets), government websites (economic data), almanacs, handbooks, and directories, journal articles.

Secondary: Newspapers (e.g. Wall Street Journal), trade publications, websites – Yahoo! Finance, CNN Money, business blogs, etc.

Political science, International relations

Political science uses specific methodology to look at case studies of current and past political events. Sub-fields include popular politics, policy, governance, and cultural studies

International relations studies theories of understanding the international system and how to explain global politics/relations/events (phenomena) through theoretical lenses. Sub-fields include security, environment, development, human rights, political economy, power, geopolitics, comparative studies, and electoral systems.

Information types

Primary: Journal articles, government documents, newspaper articles, theory, social media, films/TV shows

Secondary: Books, textbooks

Tertiary: Encyclopedias, handbooks

Law

The study of Law often begins with ‘Black letter law’, which focuses on interpretation of cases and statute. Jurisprudence is another area which looks at theory of law. In later years, Law

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students look at studies in specific areas. Other areas of study include treaties and international law.

Primary: Legal cases, statutes, policy documents, government reports

Secondary: Textbooks, judicial commentary, journal articles

Tertiary: Encyclopedias

Architecture

Undergraduate students prepare to become an architect by learning how to develop and implement designs, understanding social contexts of the built environment such as urban planning, and develop key IT skills. They work on designs, learn theory that informs design, and develop skills in working with the medium of their choice.

Information types

Primary: Blueprints, journal articles

Secondary: Textbooks, books

Tertiary: Encyclopedias

Journalism, Media, Communications

In the fields of Journalism, Media, and Communications, students learn how to produce a variety of texts for different purposes of public communication, such as written texts, videos, and audio pieces (podcasts and radio). They also study theories and practices of contemporary public communication to understand and develop their craft.

Information types

Primary: Newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, websites and blogs, videos, images, journal articles

Secondary: Textbooks, books

Tertiary: Encyclopedias

Thank you to the University of Sydney Librarians for advising on this resource

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