

**CITY** OF GLASGOW  
COLLEGE

# Research skills

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## Introduction

Different courses require different styles and levels of research, so this guide focuses on methods that can help you get to grips with general research.

This guide looks at the following stages of research:

- **refining** the research topic
- **analysis and planning** a course of action
- **carrying out** your research

The Library offers several other guides for students in this series, as well as resources to support your studies, such as books, e-books, DVDs and online information services. Please **ask Library staff** if you need further information about using any of these resources.

## Define the research topic

In order to carry out useful research, you must know exactly **what you are being asked to do**. The assignment for which you need to research information could be:

- writing a report
- writing an essay
- giving a presentation
- project work
- writing a dissertation
- web development

Think carefully about **the nature of the assignment** you have to complete: what **types of information** will you need to gather during research? **Where** might you find relevant information?





What is the **scale of the assignment** you are being asked to do? If you have to write a 5000 word essay, you are likely to require more research

than is necessary for a 1000 word essay. Likewise, the amount of research required for a presentation may be influenced by the length of time the presentation is scheduled to take.

The assignment **deadline** is another factor you should consider. How much time do you have until the assignment has to be submitted, or you give your presentation? Work out how you will divide your available time between carrying out research or preparation, and how much time you will need for writing up and completing the assignment.

If, at this point, you are still unsure about what you are expected to do, you should consult your tutor or lecturer **for further advice**.

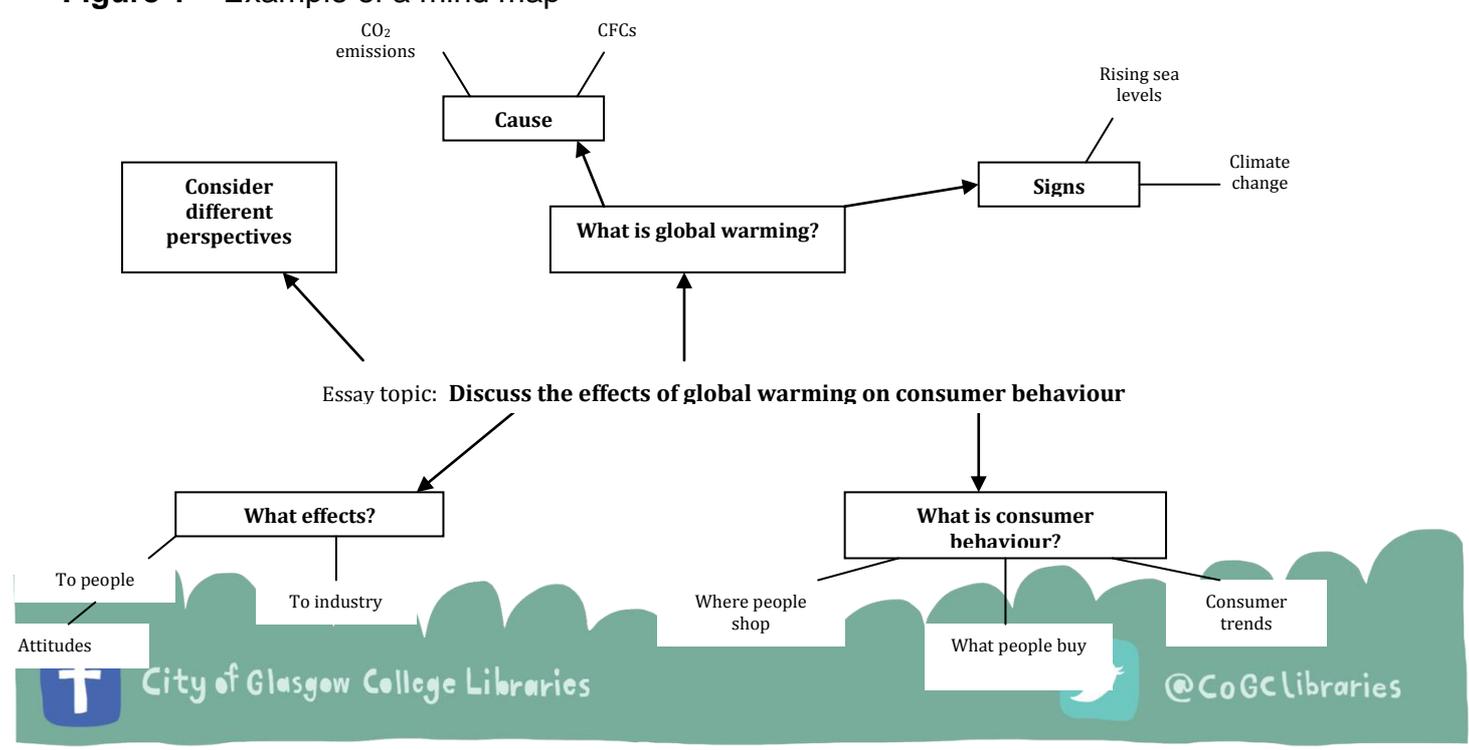
### Analysis

Once you have considered what your assignment involves, you are ready to analyse it. This helps you decide what information you will try to find whilst researching.

One method of analysing an assignment is to brainstorm using a “*mind map*”. To make a “mind map”, write the assignment question or topic in the centre of a page. Begin by identifying and analysing **keywords and issues** by circling or highlighting them. You may find that by asking several small questions, you can decide what information you will need to gather.

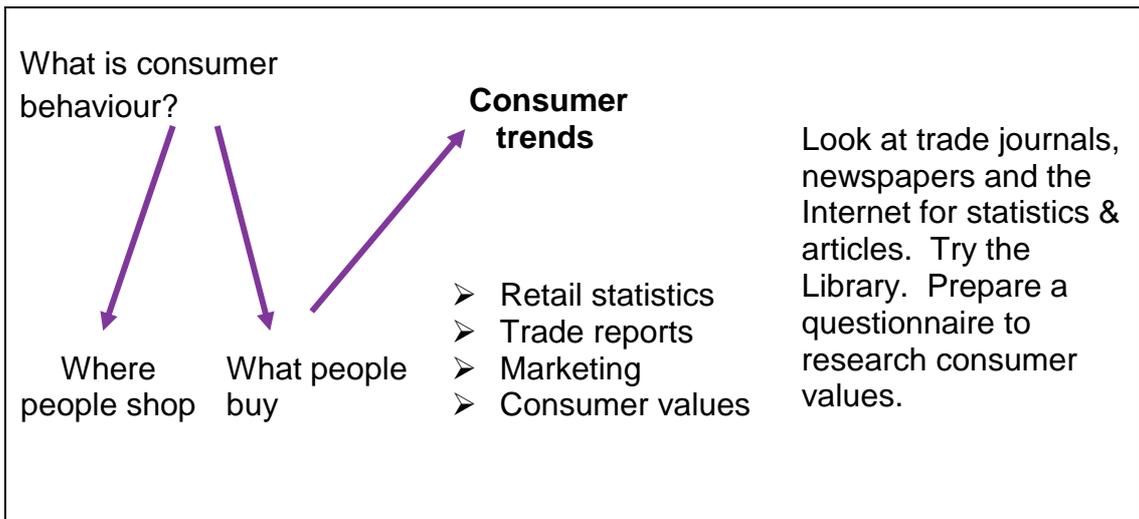
The example below shows how keywords and issues are highlighted. Related questions and answers and relevant information are linked in.

**Figure 1 – Example of a mind map**





Your own “mind map” can be much more expansive than the example given. Once you have finished your mind map, you can **highlight** the “branches” which you feel are most relevant to your assignment. Then you may wish to **expand information** and consider what **resources** you can use to gather relevant information.



**Figure 2 – Exploring branches**

The example above shows how relevant branches are highlighted and expanded. A brief **course of action** is also written beside the expanded topics. This allows you to begin planning your research.

**Tips for Mind Maps**

- When highlighting branches, use a contrasting colour of pen or pencil – or even include some relevant drawings
- For further information about Mind Maps see the following web sites:

[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS\\_01.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS_01.htm)

<http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/mind-maps-examples.htm>

(The above sites were accessed on 22 June 2016)

## Planning your course of action

At this stage, you should have considered what your assignment entails and how long you have to complete the assignment. During the analysis stage you should also have considered **what** information you wish to find during research and **where** you might find it.

To help you organise your course of action, use a **research timetable**. This should contain a list of the **areas you wish to research** or the **information you wish to find**, along with the sources(s) of information you plan to use during your research. Include a time column, to allow you to plan what you do and when.

### Example of a Research Timetable

INFORMATION REQUIRED	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	CARRY OUT RESEARCH ON	✓ WHEN DONE	Note:
Statistics about global warming (possibly tables)	1. Abstract of statistics 2. Greenpeace website	Mon 11/1/10 Lunchtime		When listing the information required, try to consider the order the info will fit into your assignment. This allows you to start thinking about a start, middle and ending for the assignment.
Public feelings about global warming	Newspaper & magazine articles – try Infotrac	Tues 11/1/10 3.00 – 4.00 pm		
Current retail trends	Retail journals – try periodical section in the Library	Thurs 16/1/10 10.00 – 11.00 am		
Definition of consumer behaviour?	Try a retail management textbook in the Library	Thurs 16/1/10 Evening		

**Note:** There is also a **research timetable template** at the end of this guide.





## Carrying Out Research

Now that you know what you need, and where you will get it, you are ready to conduct your research. Try to **stick to your research timetable** as best you can – this will help avoid a last minute rush!

The information sources you use will probably fall in to one or more of these areas:

- people
- printed resources
- electronic resources

### People



You may need to contact people or organisations for specific information. Decide which communication **method** is most appropriate:

- letters
- phone calls, Skype
- e-mails
- fax
- meetings and interviews

Drawing up a questionnaire might help as it allows you to **structure the information** you are looking for, and to **limit the range of answers**, which makes recording your results easier.

**Be sure to allow plenty of time for communication, especially with letters or questionnaires – you may need to chase up responses.**

### Printed Sources



The College libraries contain a wide selection of printed resources that can be used during





your research, such as:

- books
- journals/magazines
- newspapers
- reports
- encyclopaedias
- dictionaries
- Government publications...

To make the best use of the printed resources available in the College Libraries, be aware of:

- The **different types of resources** available and where they can be found in the Libraries.
- The Library online **catalogue**. Learn how to search for specific titles, authors or perform a general subject search. This is much more effective than simply browsing through stock!

**If you can't find what you are looking for, ask Library staff for assistance.**

### Electronic Sources



During your research, make use of the electronic sources in the Library and beyond, such as:

- Electronic library resources (e-resources, e.g. ebooks) – we have a wide range!
- the Internet – see the Library's *Evaluating information* guide to discover **how to find reliable information** on the internet
- DVDs





### To make the best use of electronic resources:

- Your network login will give you full access to all of the Library's electronic resources. Ask Library staff for advice on the resources best suited to your subject.
- Remember to use the range of course materials on MyCity.
- Take advantage of relevant DVDs available in the Library. Use the Library catalogue to check what is stocked.
- Check TV listings or on-demand TV services (e.g. BBC iPlayer, All4) for documentary, news or current affairs programmes that tie in to your research. Use **Box of Broadcasts** to record programmes from Freeview channels and watch archived ones – visit <http://bobnational.net>

### General research tips

- Be selective about what you read. Make sure material is relevant to your research. Use the **table of contents** at the front of books, or the **index at the back**, to check if your areas of interest and key words are covered.
- If you have a lot of pages to cover, try to **skim read**. To do this, choose a few **keywords** most relevant to your topic, then “skim” the text quickly. Slow down when you spot any keywords and note any useful information.

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### Note-taking

- When taking notes from a written source, read through the source first, and then make the notes. This helps avoid copying chunks of information, plus you are more likely to make notes of the information that stood out most.
- If you are taking notes from several sources, make sure that you are not repeating yourself. Will these notes **add** to those you have already taken?
- Try mind maps as an alternative to conventional note-taking. Check out the mind map web sites listed on page 4, or try the Library's *Mind maps* guide.





## Be sure to evaluate all sources of information!

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Where** does the information come from? e.g. government statistics, pressure groups, and individual's page on the Internet...
- How **reliable** is the information? Is it from an official or academic source, or simply an individual's opinion?
- How **relevant** is the information to your topic? Don't waste your time on information that is "interesting" but doesn't add to what you already know.
- Is the information **biased** in any way e.g. politically, culturally, etc.? This may be obvious from the source.
- How **current** is the information? Check that your source is still current, especially if it is statistical – it may be re-issued or updated on a regular basis.

**For more guidance on this, see the Library's *Evaluating information* guide**

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Keep a note of **all** the sources of information you have looked at during the course of your research. This allows you to:

- **quickly** find any sources again, should you require more information or need to confirm a point
- compile a bibliography **easily**

**There is a bibliography template on the last page of this guide.**

**For more information on referencing a variety of resources, see the Library's *How to cite references and create a bibliography* guide.**





**Research Timetable**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_ Submission date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>INFORMATION REQUIRED</b>	<b>SOURCE OF INFORMATION</b>	<b>CARRY OUT RESEARCH ON</b>	<b>✓ WHEN DONE</b>



### Bibliographic Information table

#### Books (including ebooks)

Name of author (surname, initial)	(Year published)	<i>Title of book</i>	Edition (edn.)	Place of publication:	Publisher	Page(s)

#### Journal and magazines

Name of author (surname, initial)	(Year published)	Title of article	<i>Title of journal</i>	Vol. no. (issue)	Page(s)

#### Newspaper articles

Name of journalist (surname, initial)	(Year published)	Title of article or headline	<i>Name of newspaper</i>	Day, month	Page(s)

#### Internet articles

Article author or site publisher	(Year published)	Page or article title	Available from: URL (full web address)	[Accessed: day month and year]

