

# Research Skills



## CSI method

### Step 1: Determine what information is needed.

- What does the question ask you to research?
- Read the marking criteria.
- Clarify instructions with your tutor.

### Step 2: Consider information you have already found.

- What information do you already have on this topic?
- Is there any information in your lecture notes, slides or handouts?
- What guidance has your lecturer already provided?

### Step 3: Reflect on what is already known

- What do I already know about this topic?
- Make a list or draw a diagram of what you already know.
- What are the gaps in your knowledge?

### Step 4: Strategies to find information to fill the gaps

- Use the library databases – these provide reliable and academic sources of information.
- Search the library catalogue for books and online material.
- Go to the library and browse the shelves for useful books (look in the contents and index pages).
- Look in the reference lists of information you have found.

## Beware Google searches!

Google searches are like “mixing in a gigantic bowl the appetizer, soup, entrée, salad, dessert and coffee. You may have the right ingredients, but what discerning diner wants to combine their salad and their coffee, or their soup and dessert” (Secker et al., 2007, p. 6).

- Google does not always put the most relevant information on the first page.
- Organisations and authors can pay to get their page or article put at the top of the list.

## Evaluating information

Use the SIFT technique to evaluate your information:

**S** Stop

**I** Investigate the source

**F** Find trusted sources

**T** Trace information to the original source.

### Stop:

Before you use information **stop** to ask yourself if the information is appropriate to use.

- Does the source have appropriate information you require?
- Is the information too general or too specific?
- Is it opinion or fact?
- Is it an academic/scholarly piece?
- Is the information supported or verified by other information sources?
- Is the information up-to-date for the topic/subject?

### Investigate the source:

- Who is the author?
- Does the author have appropriate qualifications, background or knowledge of the subject?
- Is there an obvious bias promoted by the author or publisher?
- Is the information from a reliable source e.g. a recognised professional body or organisation?
- What is the level it is aimed at – general public, young children, tertiary students, professionals?

### Find trusted sources:

- Has the information been peer reviewed?
- Is the information supported by appropriate references?

### Trace information to the original source

- As far as possible, use the original source rather than a secondary source (as cited in...)

## Some further points to consider when using internet information:

- Anyone can place information on the web.
- It is not always obvious who placed the information on the web site.
- There are very few or no quality controls on the content of web pages.
- There is a lot of advertising on the web. Think about the intention of the author. Is it to inform, sell products or educate?