Gathering Research for your Dissertation

In most subject fields at Queen's you will be asked to complete a dissertation. While writing the dissertation can be a challenge in itself, so can gathering the resources needed to answer your stated research question.

Try some of the following tips for collecting research material together:

- **Refer back to your module guide:** Your module guide is full of useful readings and resources. Generally they are neatly organised under topic headings. Your module convenor will have spent a significant amount of time in selecting relevant material for each topic and will have provided you with both *essential* and *desirable* readings. Whereas you wouldn't normally be expected to consider all of this reading in advance of a weekly tutorial, you should become familiar with this content if it is relevant to your dissertation research.

- **Identify the key words in the dissertation topic:** Deconstruct the dissertation title and highlight each of the key words. This is important as the key words will help to inform your background research and will be used when gathering reading material and other resources. Ask yourself, do you fully understand the question and/or the dissertation topic? Often students struggle to begin their research because they aren't sure of the task at hand. Don't be afraid to approach your module tutor for clarity. In addition, feel free to meet with your peers and discuss your proposed dissertation topic.

- **Visit the Library:** Depending on your discipline, the library will be your first port of call. The various library facilities (McClay, Medical & HSC, and Biomedical Library) are well stocked to help provide you with important research material. A useful tip is to visit the same area in the library where your essential or desirable reading material can be found. Books of a similar ilk tend to be stocked together. In addition, approach your subject librarian who will be happy to help.

- **Conduct a literature search using the QCat system:** Make use of the library catalogue at Queen's. QCat Discover uses advanced web searching to combine book and article searching in to one single interface. In addition, E-Journals as well as E-Books and database links are also fully integrated into the new service.

- **Get familiar with Google Scholar:** Although it should not be considered your first port of call, Google Scholar has become a popular tool for gathering scholarly material on any given topic. The search facility provides a relatively simple means of broadly searching across disciplines and sources for potential research material. It can be useful for a first insight in the existing literature. However, it is best practice to rely mostly on more academic and established databases.

- **Use LibGuides:** Located on the library homepage (or if you can't find it search for this in google), LibGuides is a site which is designed to provide research assistance. You will find subject specific material and databases,* which have been compiled by your subject librarians. **Tip:** Sometimes it is worth searching across fields/disciplines. Additionally another subject librarian might make reference to a database which could be useful for you but is not listed in your subject field i.e., JSTOR, Web of Science, SCOPUS etc.

- **Organise your resources BEFORE you start to write:** As with any piece of academic work, ensure you have a clear plan in place before you begin to write your dissertation. Organise the material you have gathered under key themes and/or chapters that you will address throughout the dissertation. It is also considered good practice to document your references as you go along using either *Refworks* or stored manually in a separate Microsoft Word programme.

***Databases:** are organised digital collections of references to published literature. These include mostly journal and newspaper articles, conference proceedings, reports, government and legal publications. In contrast, a library catalogue is more often than not a collection of monographs i.e. books. Quite often databases are focused on a specific academic discipline e.g., PsychInfo, Medline, Internurse etc. Be aware: On occasion you will only have access to the journal's abstract as a result of the library's limited licence. If this poses a problem, feel free to ask your supervisor to grant you access to a specific article or discuss accessing an article with the subject specific librarian.*