Introduction to Music Research Sources

During your research project you may need to consult a variety of sources, such as books, articles or dissertations. This worksheet offers general tips about where the information in these sources comes from, how each type of source can help you, and when you might want to use it.

Books
Found in: Primo, Worldcat

Books are useful both for background information and in depth research on a topic.

Scholarly books are written by researchers during intensive study, and typically published by university presses. Usually they synthesize original thinking with the work of prior scholars.

You can use the index and table of contents to quickly find relevant information. If the book has a bibliography, use it to discover more sources on your topic.

Articles
Found in: Primo, RILM and other databases

Articles tend to be more timely than books and cover more specialized topics. They are published in regularly appearing publications called journals, available in print or online.

Peer-reviewed articles are written by researchers and evaluated for quality and accuracy by other experts in the subject area. To avoid bias, often the reviewers and authors are not aware of each other's identity.

Popular magazine articles may be written by journalists, hobbyists or other individuals interested in a topic. While they are usually not subject to the same rigorous acceptance process as peer reviewed research, they can still be important information sources, depending on your research topic.

Reference Sources (Bibliographies, Dictionaries and Encyclopedias)
Found in: Primo, Oxford Bibliographies Online - Music

Bibliographies are lists of the best, most influential research on a topic, compiled by scholars and librarians.

Use bibliographies to save time when getting started on your research and to uncover specialized sources you need to complete your research project.
Dictionaries are alphabetically organized summaries of information on a topic. Some dictionaries are made for quick consultation, when you need to define a term you just read in a book or article. Their definitions are only a paragraph or two and may not include images or citations. However, other dictionaries feature longer essays written by scholars who can summarize what is known in their area of specialty, including charts and citations.

Encyclopedias are similar to dictionaries, but are more likely to be organized by topic rather than alphabetically, and are more likely to have longer entries with more citations.

Consult dictionaries and encyclopedias at the beginning of every research project. You may be surprised to find how specific, and time-saving, their short entries can be!

**Theses and Dissertations**

*Found in: Primo, RILM, Worldcat, Google/Google Scholar*

Theses, dissertations and conference papers provide information on the most specialized topics in music research.

Graduate students write theses and dissertations under the guidance of faculty advisors. These sources summarize previous research and provide references.

When scholars present their research in person at a conference, they may submit a writeup to be published in the proceedings. Proceedings tend to be more difficult to find than books or articles because fewer libraries collect them (for example, Armacost Library does not usually have conference proceedings).

Due to their specialized nature, these sources often look like "the perfect source" for your paper topic. However, they can be some of the most difficult to find.

Reviews often contain summaries of recent research on a topic, and compare the book in question to other books written in that area. These evaluations are useful for graduate students who need to build knowledge in an area of specialization.

Reading book reviews at the start of the research process can also help you get the background knowledge you need to write a more effective paper - or at least lead you straight to the most authoritative sources, saving your time!