

University Library: Skills for Researchers

Guide to Searching Grey Literature

To carry out a thorough search of the literature, it is necessary to look beyond conventionally published books and journals. You will also need to identify work that is either unpublished or has been published in non-commercial form. This material is called Grey Literature.

Who Produces Grey Literature?

Grey literature is often generated by researchers and practitioners but is not controlled by commercial publishing. It can also be produced by charities and non-profit organisations, societies, special interest groups, professional associations, universities, central government and local authorities, international bodies such as WHO, World Bank etc., businesses, market intelligence consultancies, think tanks, political/pressure groups, patient, and consumer groups and many more.

Why should I use it?

- Some material is only available as grey literature e.g. material intended for funding bodies such as the preliminary results of research projects.
- Excellent source of raw data (e.g. statistics)
- Rapidly produced and disseminated (only possible without the formal publication process journal articles are subject to) – conference proceedings and results of studies may appear as grey literature over a year before appearing in conventionally published journals.
- Information can be fuller and more detailed than would be possible in journal articles, as grey literature is not bound by space restrictions.
- Enables the viewpoints of individuals less likely to publish in journals to be heard – such as patients, victims etc.
- More likely to be industry- or sector-focused, rather than being from an academic perspective. This can give a valuable insight into working in a chosen profession.
- Reduce positive result bias – negative results are more often included in Grey Literature than in conventionally published literature. Looking for unpublished material is a way of counteracting positive bias.
- Can be a way of obtaining geographically discrete information e.g., local area.
- Can offer coverage of specialist interest topics not often found in mainstream titles.

Is Grey Literature Academically Sound?

- Use caution and judgement - without peer review, the quality of the material will be variable.
- It may be difficult to check the authenticity and reliability of documents. Basic information such as author, publication date or publishing body may be missing.

What types of material does Grey Literature include?

- Bibliographies

- Blogs, podcasts, emails, telephone conversations
- Committee reports
- Conference papers / posters / proceedings / data sets
- Discussion / working papers
- Factsheets
- Gov. reports/white papers/parliamentary papers
- Guidelines
- Market reports
- Newsletters
- Policy documents, best practice documents
- Preprints
- Protocols
- Research reports
- Standards / patents / technical specifications
- Statistical resources and publications
- Technical reports
- Theses / Dissertations
- Trials Registers – e.g. Clinical Trial

How do I find it?

Grey literature is often freely available via the internet but can sometimes be expensive to buy or subscribe to. It can also be found on some subject pages e.g. conference proceedings. Tips for finding relevant grey literature include:

- Build up a list of organisations and universities that might be involved in your area of interest. Consider government agencies, advocacy groups, private agencies, non-governmental organisations, industry, trade or professional organizations. Once you have identified a likely organisation you can often locate publications on their website. If the organisation’s website does not have a tab or page dedicated to publications and/or research findings, try using the site’s search function to locate what you are looking for. (The search strategies you use to locate information on a website will need to be broader and simpler than the strategies used to locate articles on a database).
- Be proactive - build up a list of key people, authors, groups, specialist bodies etc. and contact them. Use social networking to locate others working in your topic area or to contact an author directly e.g. via LinkedIn, ResearchGate or Academia. You might also wish to set up a project wiki or blog to encourage further dialogue.
- Join relevant mailing lists e.g. JISCMail
- Search relevant databases and collections.

Examples of useful resources to search for grey literature across all subject areas:

Resource	Scope
BASE – Bielefeld Academic Search Engine www.base-search.net/	BASE is one of the world's biggest search engines for academic open access web resources. BASE is operated by Bielefeld University Library, in Germany.
British Library www.bl.uk/	Reports, conferences and theses can be searched through the British Library Integrated Catalogue.
Charity Choice www.charitychoice.co.uk/	Charity directory and fundraising website with a list of all UK registered charities.
EthOS http://ethos.bl.uk	A database from the British Library offering full-text access to PhD theses from most British universities. Theses not

	immediately available for download can be digitised to order. You will need to register to view content.
Global ETD Search (NDLTD) http://search.ndltd.org	Search for theses world-wide with the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations. Links to full-text where available.
Google / Google Scholar www.google.co.uk/ http://ezproxy.wlv.ac.uk/login?url=http://scholar.google.com	Both Google and Google Scholar can be useful means of carrying out broad sweep searches. (Tips – to search a domain for grey literature use the filetype:pdf search filter, as a lot of the grey lit is in the form of PDFs, or search within a website by including the web address of the website in your search terms e.g. “education AND site:www.wlv.ac.uk”).
Gov.UK Publications www.gov.uk/government/publications	Official documents, command papers, House of Commons papers as well as Key Departmental papers – from 2012.
GreyNet International www.greynet.org	GreyNet focusses on Research, Publication, Open Access, and Education in the field of Grey Literature. Includes the resources Grey Source, The Grey Journal and many other resources about grey literature.
JISCMail www.jiscmail.ac.uk/	Email discussion lists for the UK Education and Research communities.
Library Hub Discover https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk	Access to details of materials held in many UK national, academic and specialist libraries.
National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/webarchive/	Older official government documents
OpenDoar www.opendoar.org	Directory of academic open access repositories
OpenGrey www.opengrey.eu	Previously known as OpenSIGLE, this is a multi-disciplinary collection of Grey lit produced in Europe. Includes technical/research reports, doctoral dissertations, conference papers and official publications.
WorldCat www.worldcat.org/	The world's largest network of library content and services. Content includes documents and photos of local or historic significance and digital versions of rare items that are not available to the public.

Examples of subject-focused resources for Grey Literature:

Resource	Scope
ACM Digital Library www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/resources/databases-a-z/#A	Links to conference information, special interest groups, interviews, recommendations, and reports in Computer Science.
Childlink www.childlink.co.uk	Focus on legislation, policies and practices regarding children, young people and families living in the UK and Ireland. Includes government papers, statistics, research, and legislation.
ClinicalTrials.gov https://clinicaltrials.gov/	ClinicalTrials.gov is a registry and results database of publicly and privately supported clinical studies of human participants conducted around the world. Part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.
Cochrane Library www.cochranelibrary.com/	Collection of six databases that contain diverse types of high-quality, independent evidence to inform healthcare decision-making plus reviews, trials, studies, podcasts and more.

Department of Health www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health	Publications, reports, policies, and other information from the Department of Health.
IEEE Xplore www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/resources/databases-a-z/#I	IEEE Xplore includes over 1,200 conference proceedings and more than 3,800 technical standards, as well as journals, e-books and more.
National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) www.nice.org.uk	Independent organisation providing national guidance on promoting good health / preventing ill health. NICE produce clinical guidance on Public Health, Health Technologies, and Clinical Practice.
NHS Evidence www.Evidence.nhs.uk	Evidence base for Health & Social Care professions including primary research, statistics, guidelines, and health technology assessments.
Social Care Online www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk	Information and research on all aspects of social care. Includes research briefings, reports, government documents and case studies.
Social Science Research Network www.ssrn.com/en/	Provides rapid worldwide dissemination of social science research.
Trip Database www.tripdatabase.com/	Medical search engine with emphasis on evidence-based medicine (EBM) and clinical guidelines and queries, including content from Cochrane and Bandolier.
National Institute for Health Research, Clinical Research Network (NIHR CRN) https://public-odp.nihr.ac.uk/QvAJAXZfc/opendoc.htm?document=crncc_users%5Cfind%20a%20clinical%20research%20study.qvw&lang=en-US&host=QVS%40crn-prod-odp-pu&anonymous=true	Search and access information on research studies which are being supported by the National Institute for Health Research Clinical Research Network (NIHR CRN).
UK Health Security: Grey literature: index and alternative sources and resources https://ukhsalibrary.koha-ptfs.co.uk/greylit/	Compiled to help librarians and researchers, particularly in Public Health, to find grey literature resources.
Web of Science www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/resources/databases-a-z/#W	Includes access to conference proceedings.
WHO ICTRP Search Portal www.who.int/ictip/search/en/	Aims to provide a single point of access to information about ongoing and completed clinical trials. Provided by the World Health Organisation.

How do I evaluate Grey Literature?

The criteria used to evaluate grey literature are the same as those used to evaluate any other kind of information. Look closely at the source to establish authority – this should be easily located in the document. Look at the methodology used – this should be transparent, with clear explanations of where the data came from, the analysis techniques used and how the document was compiled. Check the document for currency.

Use the 'AACODS' checklist, from Flinders University, South Australia, designed as a memory aid in evaluating grey literature:

- A Authority
- A Accuracy
- C Coverage
- O Objectivity
- D Date
- S Significance

References:

Flinders University (2010) *AACODS Checklist*. Available at:

https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/bitstream/2328/3326/4/AACODS_Checklist.pdf (Accessed: 16 January 2022).

Further reading:

Oliver, P. (2012) *Succeeding with your literature review*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press.

Help and Advice

If you would like further help, please use our Library ASSIST chat <https://wlv.libanswers.com> or email the Liaison Librarian team at Llsliaison@wlv.ac.uk Oliver, P. (2012) *Succeeding with your literature review*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press.



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