

# Locating Information

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The beginning steps in research, or what is often today called knowledge management, is finding, selecting, organizing, synthesizing, and using information in order to improve the audience's understanding of a particular topic.

Finding and selecting sources involves locating information from sources and determining which information is potentially the most useful. Organizing refers to the decisions made about ways to categorize, catalogue, index, and link relevant parts of selected information. Synthesizing knowledge is a matter of refining organized information by contextualizing and summarizing it, by connecting it to what you already know. Using information means that you disseminate synthesized information by sharing it with others in a particular format.

## Narrowing a Topic

- 1) *Narrowing a topic.* Examine your own interest in the subject. You will do a better job researching a topic that interests you.
- 2) *Perform secondary research to learn more about the issues.* Your next step is to learn as much as you can about your topic by reading books, articles, and Web sites. This research will help you learn about the many issues involved in the topic. You will find that a tremendous amount of information is available on your topic.
- 3) *Narrow the topic by subject, by time, place, or event.* This aspect of your topic gives you a way to focus the scope of your discussion.
- 4) *Formulate a research question.* You can see whether your topic is sufficiently narrow by trying to formulate a research question.

## Planning a Research Strategy

- 1) *Work out a schedule for the project that requires the research.* When is the deliverable—the document or the presentation—due?
- 2) *Visualize the deliverable.* What kind of document will you need to deliver?
- 3) *Determine what information will need to be part of that deliverable.* Draft an outline of the contents, focusing on the kinds of information that readers will expect to see in each part.
- 4) *Determine what information you still need to acquire.* Make a list of the pieces of information you don't have.
- 5) *Create questions you need to answer.* Make a list of questions that can guide your research. Writing the questions in a list forces you to think carefully about your topic. One question suggests another, and soon you have a lengthy list that you need to answer.
- 6) *Conduct secondary research.* You can find this information in journal articles and from Web-based sources, such as online journals, discussion groups, and bulleting boards.
- 7) *Conduct primary research.* You can answer some of your questions by consulting company records, by interviewing experts and by conducting surveys and interviews of representative employees.
- 8) *Evaluate your information.* As discussed later in this chapter, once you have your information, you need to evaluate its quality: is it accurate, comprehensive, unbiased, and current?
- 9) *Do more research. If the information you have acquired doesn't sufficiently answer your questions, do more research.* And, if you have thought of additional questions that need to be answered, do more research. When do you stop doing research? You will stop only when you think you have enough high-quality information to create the deliverable. For this reason, you will need to establish and stick to a schedule that will allow for multiple phases of research.

## Paraphrasing Accurately

- 1) *Study the original until you understand it thoroughly.* Don't just search for a quote that appears to fit. Think about its relevance to your argument.
- 2) *Rewrite the relevant portions of the original.* Use complete sentences, fragments, or lists, but don't compress the material so much that you'll have trouble understanding it later.
- 3) *Title the information so that you'll be able to identify its subject at a glance.* The title should include the general subject and the author's attitude or approach to it.
- 4) *Include the author's last name, a short title of the article or book, and the page number of the original.* You will need this information later in citing your source.

# Locating Information 1

## Evaluating the Information

- 1) *Accurate*. The information should contain accurate facts, not based on opinion or conjecture.
- 2) *Unbiased*. You want sources that have no financial stake in the project.
- 3) *Comprehensive*. You want to hear from different kinds of people—in terms of gender, cultural characteristics, and age—and from people representing all views of the topic.
- 4) *Appropriately technical*. Good information is sufficiently detailed to respond to the needs of your readers but not so detailed that they cannot understand it.
- 5) *Current*. If your information is 10 years old, it might not accurately reflect today's situation.
- 6) *Clear*. You want information that is easy to understand; otherwise, you'll waste time figuring it out, and you might misinterpret it.

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### Sources

Burnett, Rebecca. (2004). *Technical Communication*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth.  
Markel, Michael. (2004). *Technical Communication*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.

## Locating Information 2