Module 3: Selecting a Topic and Identifying Literature for Review

With this Chapter of Galavan’s book, we really get to the heart of the matter: what are you going to spend weeks and hours reading and writing about? Chances are good that you’ve already been giving this some thought and you may have already even had assignments asking you to lay out some ideas. Now it’s time to get more systematic.

In this brief presentation, I am going to focus on how you can augment the approach that Galavan has proposed with some current tools, namely Zotero and its plug-in for Microsoft Word™. But also, I am going to propose a slight re-ordering of the steps in this process. Instead of starting with his Step 1, I’m skipping ahead.

Step 6: Familiarize yourself with online databases, especially Google Scholar.

Step 7: Identify the relevant databases in your field of study.

(and then)

Step 1: Search an appropriate database.

I think that this is more logical and more like what most students do. While, yes, they may start with a general research area, the question is, where do you find those sources? In the appropriate database (or databases), which you then search.

As an example to work through over the entire chapter, Galavan made an interesting choice here, as it’s a psychological topic—language acquisition—but then works through his example in the more education-focused database, ERIC. Now, a few points to be made. First, you’ll notice that he provides numbers corresponding to the “hits” or records returned with various search strategies. And is generally the case, the more specific (and longer) the search terms, then the fewer records they are likely to return.

I’m actually going to end this presentation now and have you interact with something a bit different. It’s called a “Guide on the Side.” There are two: one for PSYCInfo, and one for the more generic Academic Search Premier. They were developed by our Psychology-area Librarian Liaison, Dan DeSanto. They’re quite intuitive. You just click through them, and the information on the left side of the window interprets what’s happening in the search interface.

What’s more, they have quizzes built into them – sort of like my “Did I get this?” thing – and you can get the results by entering your name and e-mail address at the end. So do that. In addition, to get full credit for this module, send a copy of your quiz results to the class e-mail account (psyc109@uvm.edu), as well as to yourself.

Then, in preparation for the next part of this Module, I want you to view the list of screencasts on using Zotero that you’ll find on the list of links for this module. Note
that I’m going to return to Steps 6 and 7 later, with a particular emphasis on those databases most familiar to reference librarians who specialize in medicine. They even have their own library!