

Government Research Guide

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I. Find Books

A) Reference Materials: Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, etc.

Reference materials offer background information and broad overviews of subjects. This information is often helpful in narrowing your topic and in selecting a specific area to explore further. Reference materials such as almanacs and yearbooks also provide quick access to statistical data.

Suggested Titles:



[Texas Almanac](#). College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press. (REF AY 311.D3 T5 2022-2023) Includes information on the organization and membership of state and local elections. Discusses the 2010 gubernatorial election with statistics on voter turnout and election results by county.



[The United States Government Manual, 2016](#). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2016. (REF JK421 .A3 2016) Considered the official handbook of the Federal Government, the manual provides information on the organization and roles of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. Lists publications, web addresses, and contact information for further details on the agencies' programs/services and employment opportunities.



[Encyclopedia of Presidential Campaigns, Slogans, Issues, and Platforms](#). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004. (JK524 .R58 2004) Contains a timeline of presidential campaigns from 1789-2000 and overviews of said-campaigns' slogans, issues, and programs.



[The Encyclopedia of American Political History](#). Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001. (REF E183 .E48 2001) Identifies the most significant personalities, trends, campaigns and elections, protests and rebellions, laws, statues and policies in American political history. Alphabetically organized for easy access.



[The American Political Dictionary](#). Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. (REF JK9 .P693 1997) Serves as both a dictionary and a study guide, with 14 chapters covering the subjects most often found in government textbooks.

B) [Library Catalog](#): **Find Books**

Students can search the library's online catalog for print and e-books available within the VC library system.

E-Books:

The library's e-books can be checked-out and downloaded to an iPad, PC, or other personal device. To download e-books, install an e-reader such as Adobe Digital Editions, select a book from the library catalog, and then check-out and download the book to your device.

View [instructions](#) for downloading e-books.

E-books are loaned for a period of 1 to 7 days. At the end of the check-out period, the book is no longer accessible and automatically returned for use by other patrons. If a book you are wanting is in use, you can place a hold on the book and receive an email notification when the book is available.

C) [Browse the Collection](#)

Physically browse the government titles shelved by call number in the following Library of Congress Classification ranges:

J: General Legislative and Executive Papers

JA: Political Science (General)

JC: Political Theory

JK: Political Institutions, U.S.

JS: Local Government

JV: Colonization, Immigration

JZ: International Relations

1) Find Articles

A) Article Databases: Databases provide 24/7 access to articles from any internet connection. They are available both on and off campus.

1. [Gale Academic OneFile](#) is the library's multidisciplinary database that offers full-text journal coverage in almost all subject areas including social sciences, political science, technology, health sciences, literature, and more. Students can enter their search term to search hundreds of journals at once for articles on their topic.

Features also include the ability to:

- Automatically generate a citation in the formatting style of your choice.
- Highlight text and insert notes.
- Download your markups into your Google Drive or One Drive.
- Filter your results by publication date, document type, and more.

2. [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#): Provides a wealth of information on current issues and controversial topics. Information includes pro-con essays, journal articles, statistics, primary sources, and links to multimedia files. The database also provides assistance in citing the information selected.

2) Suggested Websites

[U.S. Electoral College](#): Explains what the Electoral College is, lists frequently asked questions and their answers, and lists resources such as historical election results.

[USA.gov](#): Makes it easy for the public to get U.S. government information and services on the web via links to government agencies and an informative homepage including a list of the top 5 current popular topics on USA.gov.

[Federal Election Commission](#): Access to Campaign Finance Disclosure reports and more information on what the FEC does.

[Roll Call Votes by the U.S. Congress](#): Provides access to House and Senate roll call votes from 1989 to present.

[Vote Smart](#): Contains information on elections & candidates, government & officials, and current political issues.

The Research Process

- 1) Select a topic that you find interesting and appropriate for the assignment.
- 2) Review reference sources such as subject encyclopedias for background information to help focus or narrow the search.

For example, students interested in the **Supreme Court** and **judicial review** may consult *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to the U.S. Supreme Court* for ideas in narrowing the focus to a particular case/decision to explore further.

- 3) Restate the topic as a question. Inquiry is at the heart of the research process, a quest to locate information which answers questions and leads researchers to a greater understanding of the topic.

Restating the topic as a question will help in:

- Locating information that is useful and relevant to the primary focus or thesis of your research.
- Identifying the keywords or phrases to use in the search statement.

Example: How can America improve **voter turnout** in **presidential elections**?

- 4) Develop a search statement by combining keywords or concepts from the research question. For example, "**voter turnout**" and "**presidential elections**" were identified as keywords in the question above. By connecting both terms with the Boolean operator "**and**", the researcher will retrieve only those articles that discuss *both* concepts, thus improving the relevancy of the search.

Enter in search field: **voter turnout and presidential elections**

- 5) Develop alternate search statements to improve the search results. Authors may use various terms to describe the same concept.

For example, **voter turnout** is often used in the same context as **citizen participation**.

By identifying and connecting alternate terms, researchers may expand the search results. As indicated below, consider brainstorming and listing synonyms or word variations to identify alternate keywords.

Concept 1		Concept 2
voter turnout	AND	presidential elections
citizen participation	AND	electoral process
voter registration	AND	democracy
voting rates	AND	election results

- 6) Evaluate information for objectivity and reliability.
- 7) Cite the information borrowed from other authors or informational sources. Careful documentation will ensure that credit is given with no intention to plagiarize or claim ownership of information belonging to other researchers. For explanations and examples, visit the [Duke University Library's Citation page](#).

Questions?

Email: librarian@vernoncollege.edu

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