Government Research Guide

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.

1) Suggested Titles:


B) **Library Catalog**: Print and E-book Collections

The online catalog offers convenient access to titles housed at all VC library locations. At the catalog screen, select “Search the Catalog” to locate titles or subjects that match your terms such as **electoral college**.

**E-books**: To search only for titles available electronically, from the “Search the Catalog” page, select “Online” as the desired location. Use the dropdown menu to choose your search method (author, subject terms, etc), then enter your search term (ex. **Campaign finance reform**).

*Helpful feature*: While viewing a book, select the “Search” tab to bring up a search bar which will allow you to locate a word or phrase within the entire content of the book.

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)
- **JK**: Political Institutions, U.S.
- **JV**: Colonization, Immigration
- **JC**: Political Theory
- **JS**: Local Government
- **JZ**: International Relations

II. **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. **Academic Search Complete**: This database searches numerous journals to offer full text articles on nearly all subjects including politics and government. Coverage includes the following journals:

   - **Politics: Campaigns and Elections**
   - **Journal of Politics**
   - **Politics, Religion, & Ideology**
   - **Political Studies**
   - **State Politics & Policy Quarterly**
   - **Texas Review of Law & Politics**

   and over two hundred others. Select from a number of different limiters to customize your search, including cover stories, publication dates, page numbers, etc.
Citing the articles: The database offers formatting rules with examples for citing the articles selected. For assistance in citing the articles, select the “Help” link in the upper right corner of the screen, scroll to view “Citation Styles” in the left menu bar, and then choose the documentation style of your choice.

2. **CQ Researcher**: Features 44 yearly reports on current issues including political topics. Coverage includes a pro-con feature, statistical data with tables and graphs, and a bibliography with related articles and books.

   **Citing the Reports**: The database will automatically generate a citation in a style of your choice (APA, MLA, etc.) Select the "Cite Now!" link from the top menu bar within an article to generate a customized citation.

3. **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.

4. **Newspaper Source**: Provides full-text coverage of many national and regional publications.

### III. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>AND</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voter turnout</td>
<td></td>
<td>presidential elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>citizen participation</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>electoral process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter registration</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voting rates</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>election results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Chat: “Ask the Librarian” link on the Library homepage.
Phone: 940-552-6291 ext: 2222