Honors 101: Modes of Inquiry
Library Assignment / Fall 2018

Introduction
This assignment will give you an opportunity to practice using library databases and further develop your skills with college-level academic research. You will be asked to locate several different sources on a topic related to your class theme, consider the credibility and relevance of these sources, and write a short essay reflecting on your process.

After completing the assignment, you should be able to:
- Distinguish among common types of information sources and begin to identify appropriate criteria to evaluate their credibility and relevance.
- Explain the role of library research tools within the larger information ecosystem.
- Conduct basic searches in WorldCat Discovery and EBSCO Academic to identify credible academic sources on a particular topic.

Part 1: Developing an Initial Research Topic and Search Strategy
Spend a few minutes brainstorming aspects of your class theme that interest you. For example, if your class theme is drug trafficking, you might be interested in the impact of drug abuse in a particular region or community, or you might be interested in the relationship between drug laws and incarceration rates. You might type up or write down some of your ideas and share them with a classmate or your professor.

As you brainstorm, consider how you might narrow your topic or make it more specific. For instance, if you were interested in the incarceration of drug offenders, you might investigate how incarceration affects treatment options, or you might focus on racial disparity in drug sentencing. It’s okay if your topic remains somewhat broad, but it should be more specific than just your class theme by itself.

Write down your topic, then develop a list of keywords that might help you find relevant sources. Come up with as many keywords as you can, including broader and narrower words. If you were researching incarceration, you might add related terms such as “prison sentences” or “criminal justice” to your list. A good keyword list will give you more options when you search for sources, as you often have to re-think your keywords to get the most relevant results.

TOPIC:

KEYWORDS:

Part 2: Exploring the Information Ecosystem
The term information ecosystem refers to the vast and complex world of information that surrounds us in our daily lives. This ecosystem includes diverse information sources such as news, social media, blogs, images, scholarly research, and more. These sources are created under different conditions and reflect a wide variety of interests and points of view.

For this part of the assignment, you will use the keywords you developed in the first part to search five different information platforms, including three free resources and two library tools:
- Google (google.com)
- Google News (news.google.com)
- Twitter (twitter.com)
- EBSCO Academic Search Complete (available on the UofL Libraries homepage)
Experiment with several searches on each platform, then type up or write down notes responding to the questions below:

- What kinds of information sources are available on each platform? How are they similar and different? How might the sources on each platform be useful for an academic research project?
- Which keywords were most effective in your searches? Did certain keywords work better on certain platforms?
- Which platforms provide access to the most relevant sources for your topic? How did you go about making this determination?
- Which platforms provide access to the most credible sources for your topic? How would you go about investigating the credibility of a particular source?

Part 3: Identifying Relevant and Credible Sources
After completing the previous exercise, you will need to identify three credible sources that speak to your topic, as follows:

- 1 peer-reviewed journal article
- 1 print book or e-book
- 1 additional source of your choice (news article, blog post, video, digital primary source, etc.)

For assistance with finding sources, contact a librarian (library.louisville.edu) or see the Research DIY website (library.louisville.edu/research-diy). For each of your three sources, type up or write down responses to these questions:

- How would you characterize the audience for each source? Was it written for experts? A more general audience? A particular group of people?
- What makes each source credible? Does the author, journal, and/or publisher have authority on the subject? How can you find out?
- Does the source appear to present strong evidence to support its claims? Why or why not? Point to specific examples from the sources that support your answers.
- What kinds of questions about your topic does each source help you answer? Why is the information valuable? What new questions do the sources introduce for you?

Part 4: Reflecting on Your Process
For the final step, you will type up a short essay (500-750 words) summarizing and reflecting on your process for the assignment. You can rely on your notes from the previous steps, but your central goal is to explain what you learned from this research experience and what you learned about your topic. In your essay, be sure to respond to the following questions:

- What were the most important things you learned about your topic from your searching and from your sources? Give specific examples.
- Why is it important for researchers to understand the different types of sources that exist within the larger information ecosystem?
- What role do library research tools play in the academic research process?
- What strategies and keywords were most helpful as you worked on your research? How will the experience of completing this assignment influence the way you conduct research in future classes?

Your paper should be a single, coherent reflection. Also, be sure to include a bibliography (list of your three sources) in a defined citation style (such as APA or MLA). Ask your professor if you have any questions about what should be turned in for this assignment.