



If you do not gather background information first, you risk retrieving irrelevant results, misunderstanding complex articles, or missing the most important sources because you did not use the correct academic keywords.

# Step-by-Step Guide to Background Research

## Step 1: Consult Subject-Specific Reference Works

Instead of general web searches, start with academic reference materials. These include subject encyclopaedias, dictionaries, handbooks, and foundational textbooks. They provide verified, broad overviews of concepts, movements, and theories.

- **For Architecture and Interior Design:** Look for architectural dictionaries, compendiums of building typologies, or overviews of design movements (e.g., Brutalism, Bauhaus). You might also need to look at visual precedents, floor plans, or case studies of similar buildings.
- **For Graphic Design:** Seek out histories of typography, visual communication handbooks, and monographs of influential design studios.
- **For Business Administration:** Consult business handbooks, industry overviews, and glossaries of economic terms to understand market contexts and management frameworks.

## Step 2: Mine for Academic Keywords

Professionals and academics use specific jargon. As you read reference works, write down the exact terms used to describe your topic. You will need these keywords later to build your database search strategy.

- *Everyday term:* "Green building"

- *Academic keywords to harvest:* "Sustainable architecture", "biophilic design", "passive cooling", "LEED certification".
- *Everyday term:* "Selling online"
- *Academic keywords to harvest:* "E-commerce consumer behaviour", "omnichannel retail", "digital marketing strategy".

## Step 3: Identify Key Authors and Precedents

Background reading will frequently mention the most important figures or examples related to your topic. Note these down.

- **Theorists and Scholars:** Are there specific authors whose names appear repeatedly? They are likely foundational to your topic.
- **Case Studies and Precedents:** If you are researching adaptive reuse in architecture, background reading will highlight classic examples (like the Tate Modern or Zeche Zollverein). These precedents are excellent search terms for finding detailed literature later.

## Step 4: Use Wikipedia Strategically

Wikipedia is an excellent tool for pre-research, but it comes with strict limitations in higher education.

**The Golden Rule of Wikipedia:** Wikipedia is a great place to start your research, but a terrible place to end it. Never cite Wikipedia in a university assignment or thesis.

Use Wikipedia to get a fast overview of an unfamiliar topic, learn basic definitions, and harvest keywords. Most importantly, scroll to the "References" section at the bottom of the Wikipedia page; these links often point to credible books, news articles, and academic papers that you *can* evaluate and cite.

# Troubleshooting Common Pitfalls

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**Information overload**

The abundance of information available online has led to a significant increase in the amount of data that we are exposed to. This has resulted in a state of information overload, where the volume of information exceeds our ability to process it effectively. This can lead to decreased productivity, increased stress, and a general sense of being overwhelmed. To manage this, it is important to develop effective information management strategies, such as prioritizing information, using filters, and taking regular breaks from digital devices.

Use this information to narrow your research. Focus on the most relevant and credible sources. Avoid getting lost in the sea of information. Remember, quality is more important than quantity. Stay organized and keep track of your findings. This will help you to synthesize the information and draw meaningful conclusions. Good luck with your research!

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# Next Steps

Once you understand the context of your topic and have a list of academic keywords, key authors, and precedents, you are ready to construct a formal search strategy.

**Continue to:** [Develop a Search Strategy and Find Sources](#)

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