



# The Oxford Guide to Library Research

*Thomas Mann*

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## **The Oxford Guide to Library Research** Thomas Mann

With all of the new developments in information storage and retrieval, researchers today need a clear and comprehensive overview of the full range of their options, both online and offline, for finding the best information quickly. In this third edition of *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*, Thomas Mann maps out an array not just of important databases and print sources, but of several specific search techniques that can be applied profitably in any area of research. From academic resources to government documents to manuscripts in archives to business Web sites, Mann shows readers how best to exploit controlled subject headings, explains why browsing library shelves is still important in an online age, demonstrates how citation searching and related record searching produce results far beyond keyword inquiries, and offers practical tips on making personal contacts with knowledgeable people. Against the trendy but mistaken assumption that "everything" can be found on the Internet, Mann shows the lasting value of physical libraries and the unexpected power of traditional search mechanisms, while also providing the best overview of the new capabilities of computer indexing.

Throughout the book Mann enlivens his advice with real-world examples derived from his experience of having helped thousands of researchers, with interests in all subjects areas, over a quarter century. Along the way he provides striking demonstrations and powerful arguments against those theorists who have mistakenly announced the demise of print.

Essential reading for students, scholars, professional researchers, and laypersons, *The Oxford Guide to Library Research* offers a rich, inclusive overview of the information field, one that can save researchers countless hours of frustration in the search for the best sources on their topics.

## **The Oxford Guide to Library Research Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Oxford Guide to Library Research for online ebook**

## **Christine Slaughter says**

This is a fabulous, fascinating book about methods of finding information (I know, it sounds weird to describe such a book as 'fascinating,' but it really is, especially if you're interested in the conceptual underpinnings of this stuff). I'm a Ph.D. student who is moving into the library profession, reading this for self-education, and I only wish I'd known about this book during my earlier experiences as a researcher! I can't wait to use the strategies suggested in this book in my own instruction sessions.

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## **Kassandra says**

I am reading this book as it is, surprisingly, a requirement for a graduate course in librarianship and I am very much disliking something about the author's underlying tone. He seems angry or frustrated and the book reads as if he is trying to argue with the reader. It's as if he is writing a paper to convince you to believe what he believes rather than to educate the reader. One example so far is that he seems to be very closed to change and seems to think if books were to be entirely digitized it would be a "terrible substitute" for libraries. I just sense a lot of fear, frustration and anger in the undertones from this author. It's a very unpleasant read when you feel as if though the author is yelling at you, or trying to argue with you.

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## **Karla says**

I fancied myself information literate, and then I read this book. The author is a reference librarian at the Library of Congress, and he knows an unbelievable amount of ways to find information. This book would be useful to most any graduate student. In particular, I think it would also be helpful for research involving older documents which aren't indexed in online databases. I also learned a thing or two about government documents. Highly recommended for library students!

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## **Clayton Hutchins says**

Even in the Age of the Internet, nothing beats library research. A good, detailed guidebook to have on hand for future reference.

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## **Andrea says**

This is a very comprehensive book that seeks to make readers aware of the vast resources available to them beyond the internet. While the author discuss the internet (and its advantages and disadvantages), his main focus is encouraging and equipping the reader to use the library (and various libraries at that). He writes near the end of the book, "Perhaps the most important point overall, however, is the observation with which this

book began: if you want to do serious research, it is highly advisable not to confine your searches to the open Internet alone. The information universe of the future, no matter how its contents may change and grow, is best understood in terms of unavoidable trade-offs amount *what*, *who*, and *where* restrictions...Within the world of learning, however, history has also witnessed the creation of a marvelous mechanism for protecting the rights of authors while also making the universe of knowledge freely available to anyone who will travel to certain locations."

I was assigned this book for a Research and Writing class. Students were given permission to skim it (as opposed to reading carefully) for which I was grateful. It's pretty overwhelming to sit down and try to read and retain everything in this book, even though the author has a very easy to follow and conversational style of writing. He includes lots of examples and very thorough descriptions of the different sources and methods for using those sources. It's very unlikely that anyone could read this book and remember all the ins and outs of library resources, but it does a great job of making the reader aware of what is available and giving tools and tips to reference when you need them. I had NO idea that all of these resources were available and even a cursory reading of this book will aid anyone in their understanding of how to look for information in places they didn't know existed. I also appreciated the author's emphasis that librarians are there to help and that you shouldn't try to research on our own because you will almost definitely miss things of which you were not aware.

Perhaps a bonus to this practical material is the author's philosophical discussion of the hierarchy of knowledge which I found pretty interesting. He talks about it a little in the preface and then in an appendix ("Wisdom and Information Science"). He makes the case for wisdom having a moral, values-based quality and that the way we organize and pursue information falls into that framework. It's a brief part of the book, but I thought it was a helpful reminder/caveat. The second appendix, "Scholarship vs. Quick Information Seeking" provides a list of practices for which to strive as a good scholar, almost like a code of conduct. The author's desire for the reader to make full use of the information, knowledge and wisdom available reminds me of one of my favorite quotes:

"A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again."

Alexander Pope

Despite the typos and somewhat overwhelming feel of this book, I highly recommend it for anyone who wants to learn and have new opportunities of information introduced and explained to them.

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## **Emily says**

This was a textbook for school, so I'm finished for now, but I plan to keep it as a research reference. I haven't read every chapter, but I've read enough to want to own it, because the content is really good, and it's not a snooze to read.

For class, we were downloading individual chapters, but I really wanted the whole book and discovered it in ebook form for \$9.99 on Amazon. I was surprised at such a low price for a school textbook and snapped it up.

There are a lot of good tips for searching effectively online, in OPACs, databases and web search. I can never remember the trickier Boolean stuff, and this book covers it in detail.

This is a great resource I'm planning to put to use in future classes.

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**Diana says**

Thomas Mann has been a reference librarian in the Main Reading Room of the Library of Congress for 25 years and uses both print and electronic sources to find information. His tips on using ordinary sources are an indispensable friend for students, or anyone with a hobby, a project you are working on or if you just wants to find, perhaps, more detailed information. The book is very readable, not at all dry or technical. You do not have to be a professional researcher or student to get useful tools from this book. Students who read the book can have their research projects for school improved dramatically.

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**Randy Hulshizer says**

This guy HATES the internet

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**Beth Stratton says**

3.5

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**Kaelie says**

Valuable, but dry and the author is an internet phobe. I want to tell him that Google is okay, as long as you're careful. Ugh.

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**Myron Brown says**

I do believe that this is a must read book for librarians, particularly those who work in academic libraries. With that said there are some caveats to this recommendation. Remember when your instructors conducted how to research classes they told you to "watch out for bias" in your information sources? Well this book wears its bias on its sleeve. Thomas Mann is no fan of the open internet as a reference research source. This book could have easily been half its length without the extended rants and asides about the open internet. The open internet does have its weakness as a research tool but it also have some strengths, especially when you don't access to the vast resources of the Library of Congress - where Mr. Mann works - at your disposal, which most librarians don't. Yes knowledge of controlled vocabularies is a useful tool but it is not everything. The last edition of this book was written in 2005 and Google has added several features since then that has actually increased its value as an academic research tool. You wouldn't know it by reading this book because while parts of this book does have updated language, other parts of this book, particularly the rants about the open internet, does not reflect some of the changes that took place in the decade between editions. The basis of some of his rants were valid in 2005 but less so when this edition was published in 2015. Despite this criticism I do recommend this book. Mann does provide some really useful techniques that will make you a better library researcher. Most importantly he encourages the mindset of focusing on the

particular before going broader when conducting research on particular topics. He does encourage people to take full advantage of the tools at their disposal when conducting research. This is a useful book but it could be a hard read for some because of its bias against the open internet.

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## **Zach Hedges says**

Could there be a more qualified authority to write a guide to library research than a man who has three decades of experience working in the reference department of the largest library in the world (Washington's Library of Congress)? Thomas Mann brings a uniquely masterful level of expertise to a subject which (as he demonstrates) sorely requires it in the age of Google and Wikipedia.

The fourth edition of Mann's Guide is fully up to date and exceedingly prepared to tackle (and employ) the most recent technological developments that affect the research process. Far from the stereotypical stuffy librarian, Mann exhibits a particular affinity for all things digital, but it is his impassioned defense of the indispensability of "bricks-and-mortar" research libraries as a catalyst for those technologies that make this work so enlightening. In short, Mann's ambition is to engender appreciation for what he calls the "trade-offs" of information dissemination and retrieval, and to demonstrate how even the most rudimentary grasp of them can drastically improve the efficiency and quality of the final research product.

After a preface which sets forth the "hierarchy of learning" and introduces the "trade-offs" that are so crucial to his argument for the necessity of the research library, Mann begins his overview of eight complementary "methods" for conducting research, along with various other tools and tips to be employed along the way. The recurring theme is the complementarity of these approaches, each of which features inherent strengths and weaknesses, in the pursuit of a full-orbed sense of the "shape of the elephant" (the research topic as a whole). This theme reads as something of a diatribe against the prevailing modern tendency toward simple keyword searching in "universal" catalogs, which severely limits and even impedes the process.

Mann's arsenal of strategies includes, in brief: consultation of specialized encyclopedias; liberal use of "controlled vocabularies," or subject headings (primarily as established by the Library of Congress); general and focused browsing of classified bookstacks; navigation of journal databases through the use of "descriptors" (subject headings); the necessary evil of occasional keyword searching (but with emphasis on its disadvantages and insistence on the use of tools such as Boolean operators); citation searches; progression through "related records" (sources with common footnotes); and examination of overview resources such as literature reviews and published subject bibliographies.

In addition, Mann points to less conventional methods such as interlibrary loans, personal interviews, and special collections (microforms, archives, etc.) which exist with insufficient attention beyond the library walls. The last two chapters survey, largely in review, types of reference literature, familiarity with which can greatly expedite research.

Of course, Mann's Guide itself constitutes a formidable resource which, in addition to sustaining an impenetrable argument for research beyond keywords, provides an astonishing sampling of the very best examples of the many alternatives. If its specificity makes for tedious (and often redundant) reading, the book thoroughly compensates through its sheer "reference-ability"—this is an invaluable introduction that will certainly ensure, through regular consultation, that the novice researcher avoids a plethora of pitfalls and takes advantage instead of a host of resources previously unimagined.

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## **Kyle Potter says**

Mann's book rewards a careful reader with an exposition of how the organization of libraries and databases serve the needs of the researcher - nothing in a library's organization is arbitrary, and this volume carefully explains how to best use that organization for deep research. He teaches useful, high-level techniques with interesting and memorable examples. This can be useful for an undergraduate research course, but it's entirely indispensable for serious academic work. Anyone starting a graduate or doctoral program should read this, as well as anyone looking for more "tips and tricks."

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## **Greg says**

This book is amazing. Not the edge of your seat kind of amazing, but the kind of 'oh my fucking god this is so cool' kind of dorky amazing. In just under three hundred pages there is so much information that it's almost staggering, and the author can handle this plethora of researching advice in a very easy to read and accessible manner. That he's something of a crummagedon (oh, why won't my spell checker know what word I'm trying to spell here, and oh why am i so lazy to go look up how to spell it myself) when it comes to computers is quite amusing. He doesn't miss a chance to take a swipe at Google, and after awhile you might even start to think that there is nothing to be found of any worth just through using Google. This can get a little bit much at times, but it's also a reminder to go deeper than Google when looking for information or doing research, and that while Google might have lots of information there is still so much that isn't there and which is in danger of being buried even farther from societies collective awareness because it's not searchable by the big G. If you're any kind of information dork it's difficult to go more than a couple of pages without feeling like your going to wet yourself over some database, or encyclopedia or website that Mann describes. So good, and at just \$18.95 it puts to shame my other textbook that is supposed to be teaching future librarians on how to find information well to total shame. (I'd say that my other textbook at more than three times the cost is probably less than a third as comprehensive as this one.)

I only wish I had known about this book, or had been exposed to even a fraction of the stuff in here when I had been an undergrad or during grad school part one, instead of just finding out about it now when I'm supposed to be learning how to help other people find all of this cool nerdy shit instead of going and working with it myself.

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## **Kristin says**

Good for listing of resources you wouldn't normally think of, but you have to get past Mann's demeaning tone...

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