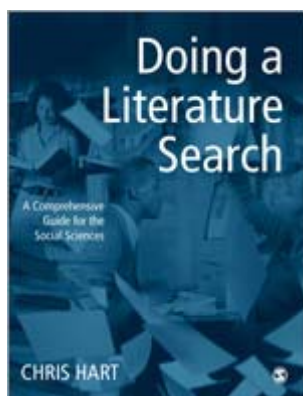


Book review



Doing a Literature Search, A Comprehensive Guide for the Social Sciences

Chris Hart

London: Sage Publications (2001)

Hardcover £63.00 (ISBN: 0761968091)

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Review by Faezeh Seyedarabi

This book is aimed at supporting students (Undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral level) and academic researchers with their literature searching in the social sciences, humanities and arts by means of providing advice and guidance on research tools and techniques essential for researchers in the 21st century.

This book is divided into three parts (11 chapters), nine appendixes (22 pages), a Glossary and Index. Each chapter begins by listing its learning outcomes ie, pages 22, 62 and 116, an introduction to a concept, technique or tool followed by a step by step explanation using diagrams, tables, examples, and tips. In each chapter an extensive list of books, databases and websites are recommended to the reader and at the end of each chapter a summary of main points/action plans are listed, ie, pages 21, 26 and 47. The language of the book is easy to understand and words like 'indicative' and 'gist' are usually accompanied by their synonyms in brackets, ie, pages 3 and 8.

Chapters 1-3 (Part A) is an introduction to literature searching where 'Topic Literature' and 'Methodological Literature' are identified as the two main search parts of any research project. In this part of the book researchers are informed about the ways in which a literature search needs to be planned, organised and managed and the importance of carrying out a thorough literature search is reiterated.

Chapters 4-9 (Part B) talks about finding different sources of information ie, 'books', 'journals', 'newspapers', 'data archives', 'book reviews' and 'fan literature searching' together with using tools such as 'directories', 'yearbooks', 'bibliographical services', 'indexing and abstracting services' and 'awareness services'.

Chapters 10-11 (Part C) identifies the Internet as another source of information for researchers to use. In this part Internet and its functionalities, different search engines and advanced searching techniques like the Boolean operators 'AND', 'OR', 'NOT' and 'NEAR' are introduced. Moreover, useful online hosts (ie, 'Dialog') and databases like the 'Social Sci Search' and the 'Arts and Humanities Search' are listed, hence urging researchers to take special care and preparation when searching online for information in order to avoid wasting valuable time and effort.

However, the organisation of this book may interrupt the reading flow of the reader, as appendixes are cross-referenced both inside and outside of 'Tip' boxes. Also the number of Tables and/ Figures in this book have landscape format that requires readers to turn the book upside down a number of times during their reading. Furthermore, book pages tend to look cluttered and at times difficult to navigate, given that headers are placed closely to the main body (text) of the book and page numbers are positioned at the top right hand side of each page. Finally, it should be pointed out that the front cover picture (the desktop computer) used for this edition of the book is outdated.

Nevertheless, despite these organisational and/ layout problems this book is highly recommended to undergraduate researchers studying in the social sciences, humanities and arts area. Given that it contains all the essential tools and information for students to prepare and plan for their literature search ie, making literature search profile (appendix 3). Moreover, postgraduate and academic researchers are advised to use this book as a reference guide for finding other books, databases and online search engines which may be useful for their literature searching.