# 10-STEP CHECKLIST

## How to search for information (2018)

Searching for information is a crucial part of writing independent academic assignments. This checklist consisting of 10 tips can help you to get off to a good start:

**1. Warm-up:**
Read material on assignment writing.
You may try e.g. http://www.scribo.dk/en or The AU Studypedia: http://studypedia.au.dk/en to get started. Scribo provides you with a number of guidelines for the first phase of writing an assignment; right from initial idea to development of problem statement, choice of theoretical foundation and research method and up to structuring of the paper.
The AU Studypedia offers general directions for studying and writing assignments.

**2. Clarification of concepts:**
It is important to clarify concepts at an early stage.
Have you identified the theoretical definitions of your key concepts?
If not, you may consult encyclopedias or other reference works at the library. It can also be useful to consider different concept definitions; it may help you define a more clear rationale for your hypothesis or formulate a more precise problem statement.

**3. Spend time on the initial phase:**
It is often a good investment to gain broad insight into the literature on your topic in the initial phase. An open approach is often a rewarding strategy; try to search broadly for literature and be aware that there may be other approaches to the topic than your own. If a lot of literature on this topic already exists, you may have to present a new angle on this field – or frame your assignment in a different way. On the other hand, if there is only limited material available, it might get difficult to write an assignment on this topic?

**4. Search for material several times:**
You should not count on finding all relevant material in the first take. It can often be useful to switch between searching for literature and reading and writing. You learn as you go, and you will probably have to search for literature several times. Perhaps you find other or better keywords during the process, which may allow you to search for material in a more targeted way.

**5. Focus your search results:**
If you get too many hits when searching for information, you could try to narrow down your results by combining more words (adding AND between keywords), entering more accurate terms or limiting results by selecting your specific wishes to e.g. period of time, language, peer-reviewed articles only, subject headings, etc. If, on the other hand, you get too few hits, you may truncate search terms, i.e. apply a 'wildcard' (most often by entering *), to replace endings or beginning of words, or you can enter more general terms or several synonyms (adding OR between key words). You may also use the tips that are stated in the help guides of many search engines. Get help at the library if you have any troubles! Some search tools are simply not constructed in an intuitive way!

**6. Get an overview of search results:**
Browse through your search results, i.e. read the abstracts, notes and the keywords that are stated for most entries. How relevant are these to your topic? Perhaps you can find inspiration to search on the basis of other or more precise keywords.

**7. Collecting material:**
Unfortunately, not all material has yet been fully digitized. You must therefore count on delays for some of the material. There may also be special titles that you may have to take out from libraries abroad. Consider how you can spend this waiting time in the best way. Could you start working on another part of the assignment? Is the material worth waiting for? Would it be better to buy some of the missing items? Or could you use other sources treating the same topic?

**8. Assess the collected material:**
Browse through the incoming material as you receive it. Read the table of contents, back cover, preface/introduction and conclusion. Assess your material in regard to relevance, reliability/validity and news value. And finally: Is the material sufficient – or do you have to find additional material?

**9. Security check:**
If you want to be entirely sure that no important piece of information is missing, you can always ask for help at the library. We can help you optimise your search profile and many other things.

**10. STOP STOP STOP!:**
At some point, you must stop searching for materials. Searching for material can quickly become a time consumer or a displacement activity which may prevent you from focussing. There is always more material that you could have included, and it is very likely that an interesting new paper on your topic will be released just three days before submission of your assignment. But it is simply not possible to include everything. And that is ok – as long as you remember to account for the choices that you have made.

# Do you find it difficult to get started?
If you have a hard time getting started, you can try to follow these steps:

**1. Analyze the theme that you intend to study:**
What is the main issue (topic) of the paper?
Which aspects and components can you identify?
What do you want focus on?

**2. Create a search profile:**
Identify 3-4 of the most important keywords on the basis of your initial analysis.
These will often be the best search terms.

**3. Find out where to look for material:**
Find the most relevant search tools for your topic.
If you are unsure of the possibilities within your topic, you can get help at the library!

**4. How to search the databases:**
Write AND between the keywords if both words must be included in the search, e.g. Europe AND Denmark. Write OR between the keywords if either one or the other word must be included in the search, e.g. Danish or Denmark.
You can also truncate search terms (most often by entering *), e.g. cultur* searches for culture, cultures, cultural, etc.

## Contact the library – if you need help!

## Gina: giba@kb.dk