

## **Guidelines for Preliminary Bibliography**

13 February 2002

The purpose of this project is to develop an initial list of sources that will be used to advance your chosen research agenda. Develop a bibliography of approximately four pages,<sup>1</sup> using any standard citation format.<sup>2</sup> You may organize your bibliography into relevant sections, depending on the nature of your work (for example, research literature, data sets, court cases, newspaper articles, etc.)

Bibliographies can send many different messages; choose your message carefully. In the mid 1990s, for example, many scholarly bibliographies began to exhibit noticeable shifts, emphasizing sources that were a) readily available, either through the well-financed distribution channels of think-tanks or through electronic media, and b) published very recently. This change sent clear messages about authors' preference for convenient research methods, and the unfortunate implications persist -- not just among younger, emerging scholars, but established, senior intellectuals as well. At this stage of your career, however, the message you want to send is this: you are a diligent, careful, critical, and innovative scholar, who has done sufficient preparation to understand the relevant prior work conducted in your chosen area of specialization. This means that the entries on a bibliography must be guided by the theoretical, empirical, and methodological focus of your proposal, and *not* the convenience of a particular on-line journal or index system. The world did not begin in 1995.

Cast a broad net for your preliminary bibliography. Examples of different kinds of sources are listed below; this list is suggestive and not definitive.

*Academic Research Literature.* This is the core of your bibliography, because it reveals which part of the scholarly lineage you are seeking to extend, refine, or challenge. Identify relevant books and articles published in peer-reviewed journals and in books published by academic presses. Peer-reviewed journals are usually, but not always, easy to distinguish from "trade" publications: refereed journals often state this status explicitly, and in any event refereed outlets are invariably less glossy than trade counterparts. Academic presses include university presses (each of them fitting into an implicit pecking order), as well as some foundation presses, the National Academy Presses, and a number of commercial publishing houses that seek to reach the scholarly market (Guilford, Springer-Verlag, Routledge, Blackwell, Sage Publications, etc.). Trade publishing houses courting the mainstream market (Scribner, Random House, Knopf, etc.) can be useful, but keep in mind that these works are written and edited for a very different audience.

*Other Relevant Literature.* This category includes secondary sources that are not peer-reviewed by scholars in specified disciplines. In many cases, the utility of these sources is a function of the mission or biases of the publisher or institution: if you are studying institutional responses to global

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend that you use single-space formatting, with two line breaks between citations, and a standard twelve-point font; but do not devote unnecessary attention to formatting or length. The preliminary bibliography will eventually be distilled into a "selected references" section in your final research proposal.

<sup>2</sup> Journal and book publishers follow a variety of conventions in citations. Spend no time worrying about the choice, unless you know for sure where your proposal or article will be submitted. Choose an example from a journal that you follow, and that is situation in the literature with which you are engaging. At this stage, I recommend that you use a citation style that includes too much detail rather than too little. When you complete a final edit and revision before sending a proposal off, it is easier to delete extraneous information than to dig up old citations. Above all, be consistent.

climate change, for example, government documents are valuable sources of information on the interplay between ‘pure’ science and politics or policy.

- Government documents
- Think-tank publications
- Non-governmental or grassroots organization newsletters
- Newspapers
- Specialized industry magazines or newsletters
- Corporate documents<sup>3</sup>

*Book Reviews.* If your work involves consideration of how a certain theory influenced the literature or debate on a particular topic, book reviews provide a valuable source of information on how different scholars judge the merit of a particular work. Book reviews in peer-reviewed journals are not influenced by commercial considerations, but are sometimes shaped by the research priorities of different journals and reviewers; the same book might receive different kinds of reviews in a flagship disciplinary journal, an applied journal, a journal of educational techniques, and a journal of policy development.

*Primary Data Sources.* Primary sources are bodies of information that have been comparatively unmediated by the interpretations and judgements of an author. This definition is somewhat helpful (think of “raw” information), but it is immediately open to challenge, because very few sources were not mediated in some way. The key point is that primary sources contain relatively raw information that, on its face, will not exert undue influence on your own interpretation in the way that someone’s book, article, or dissertation might. Included in this category are historical documents, archival materials, and publicly available datasets developed for a particular study that are subsequently shared with the scholarly community (search on CIESIN,<sup>4</sup> ICPSR,<sup>5</sup> and other repositories). The largest body of data sources are publicly-financed data collection efforts that are designed to serve a wide variety of scientific, policy, and commercial purposes (rather than just for a single study); some researchers, therefore, draw a distinction between “primary” data (gathered for your own purposes as part of a study) and “secondary” data (when the researcher uses data gathered by another institution or research team). If your research proposal requires that you do physical geography field investigations, social surveys, or in-depth interviews, then you may not be able to list any primary data sources on your preliminary bibliography.

*Dissertations.* You should use the on-line dissertation abstract indexes to identify relevant dissertations completed in your area of specialization over the last five or ten years.

*Web Sites.* Web-based sources generally lack the authority of peer-reviewed sources, but in some circumstances this generalization is changing (with the rise of refereed online journals, the profusion of official government documents online, etc.). Be judicious, and make sure that electronic sources constitute a large portion of your bibliography *only if appropriate* to your topic (e.g., the role of the world wide web on transnational activism and social movements). You may wish to put web-based sources in a separate category in your bibliography, but they may also be folded into the other discrete categories as appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> If you can get your hands on them, and if you don’t violate any confidentiality provisions.

<sup>4</sup> The Center for International Earth Science Information Network, at Columbia University. <http://www.ciesin.org>.

<sup>5</sup> The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. <http://www.icpsr.org>