Glossary of information types

In this post, we explore different types of information you may reference or use in your assignments.

# Archives

Archives are collections of historical documents or records. They can reveal information about places, institutions, individuals or groups of people.

You might use an archive of letters in an assignment about the life of a particular author, or use company archives for an assignment on the history of an organisation.

# Blogs

Blogs are a type of website which are used to communicate ideas, opinions or information on a regular basis. They can be published by individuals, groups, companies or organisations.

You might refer to blog posts in an assignment to illustrate different points of view, or if you are looking for up-to-date reaction and analysis to recent events.

Researchers often keep blogs about their research, so they can be a good source of information about the latest developments in your field.

# Company and financial information

Company and financial information can cover a wide range of information, from stock prices and CEO information to turnover.

This information is not usually easily available and will require you to use specialist business databases. Take a look at this [podcast and post to find out more](https://medium.com/specialist-library-support/company-and-financial-information-choosing-a-database-e2d1bfee91a4).

# Conference proceedings

Proceedings are collections of papers that have been presented at a conference, usually in science and engineering disciplines.

They can be difficult to find as they are often published erratically, though fields like computer science publish their findings regularly.

The content of these papers is usually cutting-edge research, so they are a great source of up-to-date information.

# Data

Data is information that can be analysed and used to answer research questions or validate and evidence conclusions. It can come in many formats, depending on the subject matter, how it’s stored and where it came from. It is important to remember not all data is digital and may include physical items such as geological samples or medical specimens.

# Encyclopaedias

Encyclopaedias are collections of information. They can cover a broad range of information like the Encyclopaedia Britannica, or a specific subject area such as Black’s Medical Dictionary.

Encyclopaedias can be useful for familiarising yourself with terminology, as well as getting a broad understanding of a topic before carrying out more detailed research.

# **Grey literature**

Referring to a range of different information sources that have been made available via an alternative publishing method, grey literature or unpublished papers can be a valuable source of up-to-date information. Often published by not-for-profit organisations and think tanks, these documents often inform policy. Historical grey literature is challenging to find as it often has no ISBN or record apart from with its original publisher.

# Images

Visual representations of anything around us are useful information sources. Images can be primary or secondary sources and come in a variety of formats that may be photographic, painted, drawn or sculpted. Images can be challenging to locate and there are specialist databases that provide access to images in particular subject areas, notably the visual arts and architecture and medical and biotechnology images.

# Journal articles

Journal articles are high quality academic sources of information. A journal itself is similar to a magazine in that it’s a collection of articles which can be published throughout the year or quarterly.

Unlike a book which, once it’s published, can become outdated quite quickly, a journal article can be the most recently published research and significantly, it is written by the experts in a particular field.

# Maps

A map is a diagrammatic image of a space usually produced with the intention of showing something of interest. Maps are interesting as they typically incorporate a degree of interpretation, making them a useful primary source to explore historical, geographical, anthropological and social perspectives.

# Newspapers

[Newspapers](https://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/newspapers) are an excellent primary source research tool, not only providing reports about contemporary responses to significant events and issues but also editorials and letters that can be extremely useful for deeper understanding. In addition to illustrating the response to events, newspaper articles can be of historical significance in their own right. However, don’t forget that articles are likely to be biased and may not always be fully accurate.

# Patents

A patent is a licence granted to an individual or organisation to affirm their sole right to making, using or selling an invention.

They can provide technical and scientific information about products that may not be available from any other source.

# Reports

Reports can take different forms, depending on the discipline.

Those used in business and management will provide information about markets, industries or companies, and they can be useful as evidence for justifying decisions in policy and business. These will usually contain statistical data along with some interpretation.

# Standards

Standards represent an approach to doing something. The approach is agreed across organisations and is there to maintain a level of quality and expertise in the area. This expertise reaches across a variety of organisations and activities, from manufacturing to customer service.

# Statistics

You can find statistics relating to almost all areas of life, including business, healthcare, transport, economics, politics and education. Statistics can be published as standalone data or as part of a wider report.

Referring to relevant statistics in your assignments can often add weight to your argument.

# Theses

Theses are the original research output of a research degree, typically for a Master’s or a PhD when in the UK. These are useful sources that can inform you what research has been undertaken and assist you in finding a research gap which could explore in your own work. They can also be helpful to identify further literature as they usually contain in-depth literature reviews.

# White papers

White papers are documents which outline and explain policy. Typically found in government, but also within business organisations, they usually set out proposals for change.

Government white papers are produced to allow for consultation with those who will or may be affected by the proposed changes in law. This allows Government to make changes to proposals before a Bill is then formally presented to Parliament.