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Before writing your first college research paper, you should have mastered the fundamentals of using twenty-first-century information resources. After reading this book, you’ll not only know how to find the best information on your topic using all kinds of sources, but you’ll also have learned how to evaluate and use the information you find.

The College Student’s Research Companion: Finding, Evaluating, and Citing the Resources You Need to Succeed, Fifth Edition, upholds the philosophy that information should be judged for what it conveys, not how it is conveyed—in other words, for its content rather than its format. You may think that Google is great and Wikipedia is wonderful, and that they are so much easier to use than other harder-to-access sources like books and journals. Although these websites are useful for some purposes, as this book will explain, if you think adequate research consists only of using web sources that are freely accessible to anyone, you will not write very good college research papers . . . and you won’t get very good grades, either.

To be information literate and succeed not only in college but also in life, you certainly need to be able to find information, but being able to judge it, utilize it, and integrate it is also essential.

The chapters that follow explain the research process step-by-step.

• Chapter 1, “Library Logistics: Devising a Research Plan,” discusses topic selection and provides an overview of research.

• Chapter 2, “Reliable Resources: Evaluating Information,” appearing as a separate chapter for the first time in this edition, offers a process for choosing the best sources for your research. With the ever-increasing amount of junk that is out there on the web these days, evaluation has become an essential component of information literacy.
Chapter 3, “The Wayward Web: Finding Good Sites,” describes what can be found on the free web and explains how to find good information using web search engines.

Chapter 4, “Database Directions: Honing Your Search,” explains what a database is and how to search it. Use the skills learned in this chapter to effectively search the library catalog, periodical databases, online reference sources, and the web.

Chapter 5, “Book Bonanza: Using the Library Catalog,” discusses the specifics of how to search the online catalog to find records for books and other library material and then explains how to actually get the items you need.

Chapter 6, “Pertinent Periodicals: Searching for Articles,” like the previous chapter, explains how to search databases, this time to locate records for articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers and then how to obtain these articles.

Chapter 7, “Ready Reference: Getting Answers,” provides an overview of how reference sources can help improve your research papers.

Chapter 8, “Integrated Information: Using Sources,” explains how to take good notes, cite your sources correctly, and avoid plagiarism.

The world of information changes rapidly. Fifteen years ago when I was writing the first edition of The College Student’s Research Companion, Pluto was still considered the ninth planet and road maps were used instead of GPS devices. Although “google” was an obscure term that had something to do with the English sport of cricket, many people were familiar with the math term “googol” (pronounced like “google”) to denote a number 1 followed by a hundred zeros.

As times have changed, so has this book. The fifth edition that you are now reading has been completely revised, updated, reorganized, and enhanced so it can be an integral text in any required first-year composition or information literacy course.

Since the last edition of The College Student’s Research Companion was published, I have been helping students as an English instructor rather than as a librarian. The previous editions of The College Student’s Research Companion were written solo, but since I now work with students in the classroom rather than in the library, academic librarian Jane Devine, co-author of Going Beyond Google: The Invisible Web in Learning and Teaching, has collaborated with me to ensure that this book gives you the most up-to-date and accurate guidance about research today.
Acknowledgments

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