Effective searching

When you begin a research task, it’s very tempting to just type the entire question into Google. However, this actually creates a lot more work, as it’s a very ineffective way to search for information. If you get into the habit of using the techniques in this guide, you’ll find research tasks much easier!

Developing a search strategy

What do you need to know?
The first thing you need to do when you’re given a research task is to develop a strategy to guide your search for information. Ask yourself what you need to know – look at the question. What is it asking you specifically?

For example, if your question is “How did the Gallipoli campaign impact on Australian society and contribute to the development of the Anzac legend?”, the things you need to find out are:

- What is the Anzac legend?
- How did Gallipoli impact Australian society?
- How did Gallipoli contribute to the development of the Anzac legend?

Identify key words

Any search engine will tell you the results it thinks you want, based on your previous searches. So if you’ve done a lot of searches for Anzac biscuit recipes in the past, Google will think you want to see more results like that, and prioritise those over the information you actually want.

In order to get straight to useful information, identify 3-5 key words to search for based on your topic. In the example above, you might search for “Anzac legend”, “Gallipoli impact Australian society” and “Gallipoli Anzac legend” for resources to help you answer your three questions.

What resources do you need to use?
Make sure you look carefully at your assessment task. Has your teacher asked you to use specific types of resources? Has your teacher specified how many resources they want you to use? Think about where you might find these resources. Make sure to check the Library catalogue, as well as LibGuides. Don’t forget about your local library!

Are there other names to consider?
When you are looking for information, be aware that events or places may also be known by other names. Take these names into consideration when developing your search strategy. If you only search for “Middle Ages”, you won’t see information that refers to the Medieval period.

Similarly, if you are searching for primary documents on World War I, you should also search for The Great War, the name it was known by before World War II occurred.