Know Your Field

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Session Goal

By the end of this session you will have developed strategies for quickly familiarizing yourself with the history, emerging works, scholars, and methods of a particular discipline or sub-discipline.

Instructors

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# Self Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My knowledge of the following areas in my field</th>
<th>Solid</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National organizations/conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local organizations/conferences</td>
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<td>Top academic departments or centers</td>
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<td>Fellowships</td>
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<td>Major institutions (museums, libraries, archives, etc.)</td>
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<td>Major types of primary sources and/or collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major scholars in my field</td>
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<td>Local scholars in my field</td>
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<td>Subject librarians specializing in my field</td>
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<td>The history and evolution of my field</td>
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<td>Foundational works</td>
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<td>Major journals</td>
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<td>Major theories related to my work</td>
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<td>Methodologies relevant to my work</td>
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<td>Popular and emerging topics</td>
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<td>Controversial scholars or works</td>
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<td>Recently published or forthcoming works</td>
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<td>Social media: preferred platform and/or top contributors</td>
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<td>Web resources: sites and portals beyond library databases</td>
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Who can I talk to?

Reach out to your colleagues:
• Start with people you know: ask your professors for names of major scholars and reading recommendations.
• Don’t be afraid to contact people you don’t know: engage scholars as colleagues and ask for help with things you can’t find just by reading (recommendations for hard-to-search topics, advice on methods, specific feedback on your research ideas).

Contact a library expert:
• Subject librarians and department liaisons make it their business to be familiar with the databases, most respected publishers, and other resources in a discipline, as well as how best to navigate them.

Follow the conversation via social media and/or RSS feeds. Look for:
• Individual scholars or labs
• Major professional organizations
• Top journals
• Academic departments, institutes, and research centers
• Conference/event hashtags

What is the shape of this field?

Take advantage of tertiary sources (academic publications whose intention is to summarize), such as:
• Scholarly introductions, companions, guides, handbooks, etc.
• Encyclopedias, dictionaries, and bibliographies
• Review articles, literature reviews, and/or meta-analyses
• Guides to research methods
Troubleshoot your vocabulary

- Do a broad search in HOLLIS or Google and look for other names for the field, as well as broader and narrower fields.
- Use Wikipedia to help you get from a colloquial name to a more formal one (e.g. “crip theory” redirects to Disability Studies).

Identify top journals and influential works

- Pay attention to the references listed in tertiary sources.
- Ask your librarian about field-specific rankings and directories.
- Use metrics such as impact factor or h-index to guide you. See the Harvard library FAQ, How can I measure the impact or importance of a journal article or book?

Look for summaries embedded in other academic publications, such as:

- Introductory chapters to major monographs
- Prefaces to subsequent editions
- “Literature review” sections of a journal articles
- Academic book reviews
- Notes & bibliographies in major works or recent dissertations
- Use full-text search (e.g. Google Books or Google Scholar) to find mentions of seminal works. Search for keywords for your field plus terms like:
  - seminal
  - foundational
  - touchstone
  - influential studies
  - landmark

What are the emerging topics in this field?

- Conferences: even if you can’t attend, stay informed via the CFP, conference program, and/or conference hashtag.
- Keep an eye on new issues of major journals and browse tables of contents.
- Sign up to receive alerts from publishers, journals, or databases (email or RSS).
- Read annual reviews (also sometimes called “The Year’s Work in…”).
Useful Tools

Requires Harvard Key unless otherwise specified

**BrowZine**
A reader app for desktops and mobile devices that makes it easy to monitor journal tables of contents.

**Feedly**
A free RSS feed aggregator that allows you to gather and read content from your favorite journals and websites.

**JournalTOCs**
A free service that aggregates Table of Contents (TOC) alerts from major publishers.

**Annual Reviews database**
Contains review articles from the sciences and social sciences.

**Dissertations & Theses Full Text database**
Searches dissertations from North American and certain European institutions.

**Oxford Bibliographies Online**
In-depth overviews for the humanities and social sciences.

**Sage Research Methods Online**
A massive resource with information on conducting literature reviews, choosing a research method, and collecting/analyzing data.

**Ulrichsweb: Global Serials Directory**
Contains detailed information about journals and magazines.
**Web of Science**
A major resource for calculating author H-indexes and tracking journal impact factors and article citation counts

**SCImago Journal & Country Rank**
A free portal that draws upon information contained in Scopus and is a useful resource for finding journal rankings in the sciences.

**Discipline-specific Journal Rankings and Directories**
Ask your subject librarian about the best resources for identifying top journals in your field.

**Harvard Fellowships Office**
The GSAS Fellowships Office is a resource for graduate students seeking funding for research support, language study, multiple-year general support, and dissertation-writing support.