OPINION

Fundamentals of Doing Research in the Humanities: Bibliographies, Writing Processes, Publishing

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ABSTRACT

Although most seasoned scholars know how to do their basic work and produce well-researched papers or books, each new generation faces the issue once again, figuring out what true research is, how to find the relevant research literature, and then how to produce a solidly investigated and developed publication. At the same time, technology is moving forward rapidly, and all our library systems are undergoing constant changes. In fact, there are ever more available databases or bibliographies that are often ignored or remain unknown particularly to more traditionally oriented scholars. So, it is high time right now to reassess the situation in library science from a pragmatic point of view and to outline in as much detail as possible or necessary what approaches and methods are advisable, how to carry out basic research, and how to move a paper from its draft stage to the level of being publishable. The discussion below is based on decades of my own research, with 134 scholarly books currently published (single-authored monographs, edited volumes, textbooks, and translations), and more than 800 scholarly articles, both in traditional print journals and increasingly in online journals, both in well-established and highly esteemed research fora and in new and emerging venues. This basically unmatched record encourages me to offer the subsequent outline of the fundamental strategies relevant in carrying out research in the Humanities, especially with a focus on literary and cultural history.

1 | Introduction

Scholarly research is of extreme importance because it moves us as an educated community forward in our understanding of our identity, culture, history, values, and then, of course, of the physical environment (sciences). Research operates on a number of fundamental principles that apply to everyone here on earth and across all disciplines. Only when a scholar or scientist follows those principles, can we accept or engage critically with the reported findings or analyses, learn from them, and proceed further in our studies. If we accept theses premises – we have operated with them already since the Middle Ages and earlier, so they have absolute value – do we as a society develop further. We depend on knowledge, and this knowledge must be reliable, trustworthy, and verifiable.

Simply put, someone studying architecture must know what our latest concepts about and understandings of physics, material conditions, mathematics, chemistry, and other aspects are, not to speak of aesthetics, functionality, and human identity. Or, we would never trust a medical researcher working on blood, for instance, who would not be thoroughly familiar with the latest investigations of the properties of blood. Of course, we constantly face disagreements, both within the scientific or scholarly community and between the researchers and society at large. Those can have catastrophic consequences so when scientists under the Nazi regime were forced to subscribe to Nazi ideology and hence Nazi concepts even in their own research areas ("German physics) [1].

Currently, while an overwhelming majority of scientists is firmly convinced that, relying on a vast amount of hard-core data, we are

facing a global climate change since we have entered the Anthropocene, powerful political and post-capitalist groups simply deny all their findings and push us globally to ignore each one of the countless and radical changes in nature that increasingly threaten masses of human lives. They reject the validity of research and science, certainly a self-destructive, religiously inspired, retroactive process that only aims at blinding us to facts, critical thinking, and rationality [2]. Pessimists are even warning us that we are hurling directly toward the abyss of human self-extinction.

Of course, in research or scholarship – for clarity's sake, we should talk about science regarding natural science fields, and scholarship regarding the humanities, social science, the fine arts, etc. – we constantly face criticism, debates, conflicts, disagreements, but the more we take into consideration other opinions, other sets of data, different conclusions, and questions concerning our evidence, the better our level of knowledge becomes. This is, naturally, self-evident and would not need to be discussed specifically. But we face a tremendous challenge, now disregarding the political issues, at current times, with traditional research methods becoming old-fashioned and outdated and with new research tools emerging that gain a much more global dimension. Numerous scholars have already discussed throughout time how to do research (for a very specialized but useful study, see Refs. [3-7]). The digital tools in existence today constitute a fascinating and far-reaching body of avenues for research we all are strongly encouraged to pursue [8], but this does not mean at all that they are easy to handle or familiar to all students.

In fact, at least in my experience, the more online databases there are, the less younger scholars seem to know them or utilize them practically. Moreover, through internet bibliographical searches, we are constantly reminded that there are countless other scholars across the world, many not publishing in English or German. Many times, the best research produced is not available in these two standard languages, but we must get access to their results to avoid duplications and to learn from them for our own intellectual growth. It is highly regrettable and actually dangerous that most Western researchers are not fluent in Chinese, for instance, especially because so many new inventions and discoveries come from that country. But how does one go about doing fundamental research with the many different search engines and traditional publications now available, and how do we overcome the linguistic gap.

So, here I will present a good number of these research publications and online tools and outline their advantages, limitations, and challenges. At first, however, I will discuss the fundamental approach to writing a scholarly paper or a book-length study, then I will review the various methodologies necessary for this process, and finally I will examine and evaluate the most important resources and bibliographies that can and should be consulted by everyone who wants to participate in the leading and most advanced research discourses. Of course, many readers will simply nod and say that this is all familiar to them, but there are certainly many younger scholars and aspiring students who might profit from this critical survey, which will certainly not be exhaustive but will hopefully be helpful and constructive for many. Since I am writing primarily from a Western perspective, I hope thereby to help my Eastern colleagues understand our basic research approaches, methods, and tools.

I will abstain from providing long lists of relevant reference works because each field or discipline has its own publications and resources. As long as the fundamental idea of how to carry out solid and comprehensive research is understood, the rest will simply follow suit. After all, most major research libraries in the world have a comprehensive reference area, or a reading room where those bibliographies, lexica, dictionaries, or encyclopedia can be found, whether they focus on artists, composers, religious figures, printers, philosophers, philosophical concepts, poets, designers, or photographers.

Unfortunately, in my own case, the University of Arizona Library has dissolved that reference area and moved the relevant publications into the stacks, which are still open and accessible but out of sight and disregarded by virtually all students. The reasons for this move mirror global changes that need to be addressed briefly. Increasingly, librarians argue that paper or print copies of those reference works are available online, which is true to some extent, but certainly not always. Indeed, data collections such as dictionaries or biographical reference works can be easily consulted online. However, as soon as the topics become more complex and require in-depth reading, many of those internet sites are clumsy, difficult to navigate, and very time-consuming.

The overall goal of current university libraries seems to be to move away from books and to have all textual materials available on webpages [9]. Whether this represents truly a financial advantage or a better access to sources, might be rather questionable, especially because the libraries thus become more and more dependent on the internet or digital copies, which implies a constant cost for electricity, often a never-ending subscription rate that has to be paid regularly and at a higher level, and the foreseeable need of acquiring constantly new computers or stronger software to handle the bigger levels of data that the end-users have to download. There is nothing more irritating in library science when one has to consult a page in a thick volume for a reference or a quote and when the download per page takes minutes. In the worst-case scenario, ultimately, publishers will no longer sell books or journals but will make available their materials through a lending system, which will guarantee a constant stream of income for them and a constant rise of costs for the libraries.

To return to the review of such reference works, I strongly recommend particularly one which strangely remains hidden from public view despite its profound, global, and highly interdisciplinary nature, the excellent and indispensable *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Encyclopedia of the Fairy Tale), now also online but not easy to use. This large multi-volume encyclopedia covers the vast spectrum of literature, the arts, anthropology, religion, philosophy, and even music regarding individual themes, motifs, figures, or historical events from all over the world and throughout time. The publisher

Walter de Gruyter describes this *Enzyklopädie* as follows:

The *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* ("Encyclopaedia of the Folk Tale") is a reference work presenting the results of almost two centuries of international research in the field of folk narrative tradition past and present. It compares the rich stock of narrative material from the most diverse ethnic groups transmitted orally and through the medium of literature, and presents its social, historical, psychological, and religious backgrounds. (https://www. degruyterbrill.com/serial/em-b/html? lang=en& srsltid= AfmBOoryWkZOOr5_95Jokc4uf_VakE0aa_vo0Jebt VeDc6ivjcLf H7qw; last accessed on April 4, 2025).

The title is slightly misleading, perhaps deliberately so, certainly because this encyclopedia covers much more than only fairy tales, and it approaches its task from a global perspective, tracing motifs or stock figures in literature of countless cultures and languages. If we keep in mind that world literature is characterized by its extensive indebtedness to the vast scope of sources from antiquity and the Bible to the Middle Ages and the Baroque, we must not ignore the intensive intercultural and intertextual connections throughout time (cf. Ref.[10]). For anyone interested in uncovering that universal narrative web of narratives, the *Enzyklopädia* proves to be an invaluable tool in the history of literature, anthropology, religion, history itself, philosophy, and art history, to mention just some of the major fields.

Beyond that, there are many insightful reference works focused on the history of intellectual history and philosophy, which facilitate the exploration of the deeper connection of any literary text within the noetic framework. After all, without a solid understanding of theoretical aspects behind any narrative or artwork, we are cut short of a solid reflection on the ideas, theories, and abstract notions sustaining a literary work. One of the most influential and relevant publications proves to be the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online) which presents itself as follows: "as of Summer 2023, [it] has nearly 1800 entries online. From its inception, the SEP was designed so that each entry is maintained and kept up-to-date by an expert or group of experts in the field. All entries and substantive updates are refereed by the members of a distinguished Editorial Board before they are made public. Consequently, our dynamic reference work maintains academic standards while evolving and adapting in response to new research. You can cite fixed editions that are created on a quarterly basis and stored in our Archives (every entry contains a link to its complete archival history, identifying the fixed edition the reader should cite" (online, at https://plato.stanford.edu/info.html) (cf. Ref.[11]). But there are countless other more or less reliable and scholarly reference works relevant in that regard, dealing with biographies, motifs, subject matters, poetic genres, and so forth.

All that matters is that any topic we are investigating, in the Humanities or in the Sciences, is approached not from a myopic and subjective, but from a macroscopic perspective always keeping the intellectual, historical, and spiritual context in mind. In other words,

despite our disciplinary specialization and constant need to focus on the smallest details, it always proves to be highly important to take the larger intellectual context into consideration. However, turning to any of those reference works only entails that we pay attention to the well-established status quo; they provide a digestion of our current knowledge about a certain subject, and this then allows us to move forward with our own ideas, concepts, and interpretations.

2 │ Thesis

Anyone trying to write a new paper in whatever academic field must first figure out what idea s/he might want to pursue, an idea that breaks new ground in whatever manner and extent. This idea does not have to be a major concept or a complete reversal of our standard notions; the best scholarly papers often simply add small but significant innovative perspectives, building extensively on previous understanding and expanding on that status. After having surveyed the specific documents, topics, themes, or motifs, an idea could surface which then would have to be explored, deepened, tested, and discussed until a clear concept emerges that can be translated into a thesis or hypothesis. Once a paragraph or two have been formulated, one could already think about a title for the paper though that might change in the course of the writing process.

However, as attractive such a thesis statement might be, the author must first make sure to understand and engage with what previous scholarship had to say about the work under investigation, or a phenomenon, so that s/he can situate him/herself into the current discourse. A paper on viruses, for instance, relying on research from the 1950s, would be useless today in 2025. Yet, chronology is not an absolute criteria to evaluate the relevance of any publication either. There are many cases when much older scholarship, such as by the Brothers Grimm (early nineteenth century) could be much more insightful than what new publications might suggest.

Here I will focus on the academic discipline of the Humanities, specifically the history of literature and culture, and, even more specifically, the pre-modern period since that is my own expertise. But everything that follows can then be adapted to other fields, such as philosophy, history, anthropology, art history, archeology, sociology, music history, and so forth. Moving further out into scientific, medical, engineering, or business fields might create difficulties that I would not be able to address appropriately though in essence the methodology and conceptualization of research would not differ much at all in those areas as well.

Hence, the next step has to be checking the state of the arts, or the current understanding of a specific topic. There are many valuable reference works such as lexica, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and the like where the authors have digested and summarized what we know about a document, a poet, a painting, a religious or cultural practice, motifs, themes, concepts, ideals, and values. Literary histories are of central importance in that regard because they provide the historical and cultural context of the poem or play under investigation and

represent the culmination points of much of the older scholarship. They also indicate, though not extensively, what relevant research has been done in the past and what future questions might entail. In all academic fields, there are constantly valuable efforts to summarize the standard knowledge, either in print or online, so these literary histories or similar works serve really well for anyone to familiarize him/herself with the state of art and the wider context (see, for instance, the intriguing efforts by Wellbery and Ryan, ed., [12]; here, each literary work is viewed through the lens of the historical developments or events at that time; the disadvantage is that many important texts and poets have been left out because of space constraints).

If the name of a poet, artist, composer, sculptor, or photographer is known, we can do some quick biographical research, for which there are available many reference works, especially in German, French, Italian, Spanish, and English. But here we have to be careful not to fall into the old trap of positivism because biographical aspects are valuable only to some extent and should not blind us to the real task at hand, that is, to analyze texts, review and examine ideas, and reach deeper insights of a cultural-historical concept. Further, most works we engage with in the Humanities and Social Studies, for instance, also need to be discussed in light of the religious framework, economic history, and political conditions. Without that broad range of knowledge, we would operate rather blindly in our attempt to develop a new interpretation of a specific narrative or artwork.

And finally, before one continues with the preparations for a paper, it proves to be highly important to return to the original source and to gain a solid understanding of its content, messages, and form. This is the principle of *ad fontes* – back to the primary text or object, painting or sculpture. The better one knows the content of a narrative work or a piece of painting, that is, the primary target of investigation, the more the new researcher can approach the task of analyzing it critically and with the hope of discovering new perspectives.

3 | Methodologies

In essence, there are two major methods in covering the field of scholarship regarding the topic for one's paper. In simple terms, there is A. the snowball method, and B. the systematic method. The former relies at first on at least one major study addressing the same issue. Since its author has already covered the wide spectrum of relevant research publications, we can rely on his/her contributions and especially the references used to reach the specific conclusion. We do not need to reinvent the proverbial wheel and should hence draw from previous scholarship as much as necessary so that we can build on a solid body of already thoroughly vetted research. After all, no one can or should pretend to offer a completely new perspective; we all rely on each other, we build a scaffold of research items and thus gain ever new insights into whatever our topic might be.

Once the snowball method has been exhausted, we need to turn to the other method, which requires extensive study of the relevant bibliographies. In the past, those were available only in print; now they are almost all present online. This means that we can begin with our more systematic investigation of what other scholars have already observed, discussed, argued about, and discovered. This search is more cumbersome because it is much more inclusive and broadly conceived, but it is absolutely necessary to avoid ignoring many studies that a specialized search might have overlooked. We cannot rely only on the selection by a previous scholar and must control carefully what s/he had chosen as support for his/her investigation and move on to other contributions. Naturally, no one can cover everything ever written about their own research topic, which would be absurd in the first place, but we have to make sure that we understand fully the major arguments already raised in the scholarly community and that we are aware of the most influential thinkers in our field.

All this also entails the very thorny issue that it might be impossible for us to take note of everything that might have ever been published on a topic in all world languages. In the future, AI-supported translation systems might help us to incorporate, for instance, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese research on our subject matter, but at this point, we can only dream of that ideal. No one knows at any rate whether the articles or books published by our colleagues in those languages offer truly significant or innovative insights or whether they mainly repeat what traditional scholarship has already observed. The same problem emerges already within our own language spectrum because many times, as has been observed quite commonly, research from the nineteenth century has at times been much more advanced compared with what we tend to understand or perceive today, often because our predecessors were much closer to the sources than we are today and had a much higher linguistic ability to comprehend medieval narratives, for instance, than we can do.

4 | Bibliographies

In the fields of the history of literature, linguistics, art history, history, philosophy, and also anthropology, we can draw on the bibliography of the Modern Language Association, which allows numerous different search strategies. There is, of course, always a cost factor involved, and we need to determine what sponsorship is available to gain access to the MLA site online. For instance, my university library makes it available online at: https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy3.library.arizona.edu/ehost/search/advanced?vid=0&sid=a6def9fe-b849-49e2-b6fe-de489debca49%40redis. For outsiders, that is not accessible. One can search here either globally, focusing on the author's name, the title of the works, subject, editor, dissertation, date of publication, ISBN or ISSN, etc. Additionally, it is possible to search for a topic by specifying the languages, the year of publication, genre, etc.

The MLA is a US-maintained database, but it is easily possible to

turn to one's own language-specific bibliography, also online. E.g., for all German-related research, it would be necessary to draw from the *Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* (http://www.bdsl-online.de.ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/BDSL-DB/templates/template.xml?vid={D3B4B309-6330-4D64-879D-3C2783A9A83D}&contenttype=text/html&Skript=home&lang=de; for a global access independent from a university library, see https://www.bdsl-online.de/BDSL-DB/templates/template. xml?Vid={EC4C7AA1-A547-4646-887A-365331194B54}&conte ntty pe=text/html&Skript=home&lang=de). Parallel bibliographies exist of course for other languages as well. Both databases focus primarily on articles published in scholarly journals and chapters in edited volumes, although monographs and edited volumes can also be found there. Nevertheless, the *MLA* proves to be a highly inclusive bibliography and covers most Western and also numerous Eastern-language literatures, linguistics, ethnography, anthropology, and religion.

There are many other databases with bibliographies for specific topics. In my field, the Middle Ages, for instance, there are also *ITER*, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy1.library. arizona.edu/ehost/search/advanced?vid=0&sid=49c77df1-51fe-4bfd-89f0-9fd3193d4614%40redis, or publicly accessible via https://www.ebsco.com/. Parallel to ITER, there is the *Brepols Medieval and Early Modern Bibliography*, also known as the *International Medieval and Early Modern Bibliography*, which includes various subsets for specialized field (religion, classics, and both databases are highly inclusive covering not only literary and art history, but also architecture, canon law, classical heritage, colonialism, etc. My access point is online at: https://apps.brepolis.net/brebibmb/search.

To widen the search perspective, we can also draw from the German *Regesta Imperii* (free of charge) which lists over 2.9 million titles in many different research fields within Medieval Studies, openly available at https://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/query.php. This database includes both articles and books. As any researcher will quickly learn, there is simply much too much research already published in virtually all areas, so this systematic research can easily frustrate the beginning scholar because it might appear that everything has already been covered by previous critics. This is, of course, not the case because we constantly gain new insights into the original texts through innovative editions and translations. Also, which constitutes a major innovative force, we regularly approach each text through the lens of many different theoretical perspectives that allow us to comprehend, criticize, and appreciate our sources in new ways that make historical-literary texts meaningful for us again, and this sometimes after more than 200 years of research history.

Nevertheless, this systematic bibliographical research can also lead to big disappointments because even our best ideas might appear to be moot by now. No one wants to or should reinvent the old wheel. It is always helpful and fruitful to reassert what previous scholars had to say about certain texts, images, or music, but if we cannot move beyond that, we should not really try it in the first place. Unfortunately, however, this is often very much the case, but a good

scholar quickly learns how to distinguish between what has been argued about in the past and what s/he might be able to discuss afresh. A word of warning, however, might also be appropriate here because, proverbially speaking, filling old wine into new bottles does nothing to the quality of the wine. As exciting as many theoretical models might be as they have been developed over the years, they might mislead us to thinking that we might have new perspectives to offer just because the critical jargon is different.

One of the major problems in all this research consists of most people's failure to read widely in many different languages. My own experiences have commonly revealed that research published in English simply reiterates what French or Italian scholars have already observed very clearly or much better. Vice versa, Spanish or Greek scholars might state what American or German scholars have previously noted. There is, in short, a huge overlap, there are many repetitions, parallels, and, unfortunately, much ignorance of our colleagues' work in other languages. Approaching our task hence with the help of the snowball method and the systematic method will steer us more or less safely through the Scylla and Charybdis of scholarly writing and publishing.

5 | Major Bibliographies for Book Publications

While I have considered so far the vast scope of shorter articles or chapters in book, the real task consists of identifying the major monographs on our topics. Most university libraries now offer a simple and effective approach in that regard by having all the relevant studies being placed right next to the primary work. However, this is then used by many scholars in a rather naive way who simply visit their library, consult the books on their topic kept on the shelf, and are thus content with their research. Most if not all libraries in the world have a limited budget, and no one can rely completely on his/her library having purchased all relevant studies on a specific topic. Thus, it is necessary to know how to search specifically for book publications on the theme one wants to pursue. Unfortunately, to reiterate this problem, this attitude has often led to the bad result that US American or other Anglophone scholars cite only English-language studies, whereas German-speaking scholars rely exclusively on books or articles published in German. This is just inadequate, shortsighted, deceptive, and also dishonest.

Our research must begin with the identification of the historical-critical edition and, if necessary, a reliable translation of a specific text. One example for the complexity involved here might be my own recent experience. I had written a short lexicon article on the Italian mystic Angela da Foligno (1248–1309) for the *Litsterary Encyclopedia* (online at: https://www.litencyc.com/, but it is subscription based). Unfortunately, once I had submitted my entry of ca. 2000 words, it turned out that this author had already been covered. When I was informed about this sad situation, I simply decided to use my brief account for an extensive article on this fascinating author. However, at that time, I was at a different location where I had no access to the reliable edition of Angela's

collected works in the original Latin or the English translation [13]. In this emergency, I searched online and found the old translation by Mary Steegmann from 1909 [14], and assuming that I could quote from that as well in the same article, I proceeded that way. When the copy editor of the journal where I had submitted my full piece later on requested that I streamline my quotes, I quickly realized that the differences between both versions were vast, making it impossible to identify the respective passages in Steegmann in Lachance's publication. Steegmann had obviously created a text that was easy to read by her general audience, but it no longer reflected the original. Thus, I had to revise my entire paper and work with a whole set of new quotes to confirm my arguments. The only reasonable approach, however, would have been to go back one more step and to draw from the original text in the critical edition, which would have required from me yet another stage in the revision process [15].

After all, scholarship depends completely on the two processes of verification and falsification, which requires, however, that we all work with reliable and historically-literally correct text editions, a topic all by itself of great significance, especially when we turn to pre-modern texts where many questions as to the authorship, authenticity, and identification of the 'original' loom very large and have led to countless philological efforts over the last two hundred years and more. If we would not have available these reliable and scholarly vetted text editions, then no one would be able to argue in a trustworthy and firm manner about any literary narrative. As an example, a Chinese colleague would cite some texts that I would not be able to check out or verify, and vice versa. His or her argument could thus reach conclusions that my own reading of the critical edition would not confirm. Very quickly, we would face a breakdown of the scholarly exchange and the loss of scholarship itself.

As we all know from our own writing experiences, we constantly change what we want to say in light of new insights, experiences, or readings, and poets are not different in that regard. Scholarly publications are hence predicated on a strong and intensive vetting process commonly called 'peer review.' As to the publication of the original texts, we all make the greatest effort to establish historical-critical editions, and those then constitute the basis of all subsequent literary analyses. Reliability and trustworthiness are the key components in research; otherwise, we become atomized and can no longer make any reasonable, convincing, rational arguments.

By means of the internet, there is a growing number of online bibliographies that aim at covering the entire world of book publications. Here I want to highlight the two most important ones which appear to be truly comprehensive databases; first *WorldCat* (or *First Search*) (https://firstsearch-oclc-org.ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/WebZ/FSPrefs?entityjsdetect=:ja vascript=true:screensize=large:sessionid=fsap07pxm1-1680-m93dn3pk-b0fqrz:entitypagenum=1:0), and then the *Karlsruhe Virtuelle Katalog* (KVK), both entirely online databases. (https://kvk.bibliothek.kit.edu/?kataloge=BVB&kataloge=NRW&k ataloge=HEBIS&kataloge=HEBIS_RETRO&kataloge=KOBV_S OLR&kataloge=DDB&kataloge=STABI_BERLIN&digitalOnly=0

&embedFulltitle=0&newTab=0). Fortunately, through the *KVK*, searchable both in German and English, everyone can get access to the *WorldCat* as well, although then the database does not seem to be equally expansive.

Let us begin with the latter because it is entirely free to anyone in the world. The organizers of this website had decided to compile access to all major national library catalogues in the world, including the Australian, Canadian, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, and Belgian ones. The search can focus on the author's name, on a keyword, a title, the publisher, the year of publication, or the ISSN. The emphasis, however, rests on the library catalogues in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Other search options include antiquarian catalogues, book traders (including Amazon or abebooks). Contrary to the common expectations by students, this is only a bibliography providing data; it is not a site that allows downloading of entire articles, chapters, or even books. This also applies to *WorldCat*. Both serve as bibliographical databases. To gain access to the articles themselves in the form of downloadable PDFs, for instance, there are other resources, such as Jstore (https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/action/showAdvancedSearch), academia.edu (not so reliable), and so forth.

Both *WorldCat* and *KVK* can be identified as the largest bibliographies in the world, which can cause some problems because a search that is not specified enough can easily result in a vast number of references that are rather irrelevant, misleading, plainly wrong, outdated, or useless. However, the search possibilities in both are almost infinite, and whenever one faces a bibliographical problem, then both prove to be extremely helpful. Here we can find all the names of editors, authors, publishers, and the like, and we can determine whether there is a book series and volume number. More importantly, these databases make available research from the entire world. In *WorldCat*, there is particularly a search option limiting it to specific languages. If one wants to identify whether a novel, a play, a collection of short stories, etc. had been translated from English to Chinese, from German to Polish, from Swedish to Icelandic, etc., the results are truly impressive. Those then allow us to determine the global popularity of a work and its universal appeal, certainly an important factor in literary research.

Of course, each university library has its own catalogue, each one differing from the others, and whenever there is any doubt about the quality of the bibliographical information, double or triple verifications serve this purpose very well. The problems, however, also cannot be ignored. The vast amount of book titles often indicates that there is much more research out there than an individual scholar can really ever digest. Nevertheless, the quantity of studies would not simply equal their quality. So, any bibliography, in print or online, is only as good and helpful as the user then proves to be. There are, in other words, amazing resources available today, and each major research library offers its own additional research tools or specialized collections of resources and collections. Whether new research publications then really mirror those remains another question. And we also need to keep in mind that a critical

paper should not be overwhelming in its bibliographical data. The scholar thus has to decide judiciously the true relevance of the references. After all, the primary material, the original work/s remains the key component, and it is our ultimate task to develop our research papers based both on a close reading of the primary work or object and a critical review of previous research.

6 | Structure

As to the structure of our research papers, there would not be too much to say because it is fairly straightforward and is practiced already in the various school classes, university seminars, and elsewhere. Three major sections are decisive. There must be a thesis, followed by a clear argument, the major body of the study, and a conclusion. The latter must closely correlate with the thesis, though it would not have to confirm it slavishly. A thesis is an interpretive proposition, which then the argument, the collection of evidence, either confirms or disproves. In fact, a conclusion that demonstrates that the thesis does not hold its weight might be more valuable than a conclusion that simply reiterates what has been initially formulated. There could be more subsections in the argument, but that would depend on the individual author.

Other components of import are the abstract (sometimes in different languages), keywords, and a concise and telling title for the entire article. A book-length study is, of course, another matter, but the structure then depends also very much on the author and the topic. However, in both cases, it always would be highly important to remember that the central thesis be formulated fairly quickly, leading over to a concise development of the arguments. In short then, the title would be the abstract of the abstract, and the actual abstract serves as the summary of what the argument will entail, whereas the conclusion brings all evidence succinctly together and summarizes the findings.

7 | Conclusion

There are many other search tools and strategies available in different languages, with different purposes and intentions, and a variety of technical set-ups. The relevant goal is that our research papers are based on solid investigations, well informed by previous scholarship, critical, objective, fair, and transparent. This means that it does not really matter where one draws the data from, as long as it is reliable and as exhaustive as possible. This brings me to the often still maligned *Wikipedia*. Indeed, it is not yet, or will never be a completely reliable resource, but it has matured considerably over the years, with strong peer reviews in the background. It exists in many different languages, and each site can easily provide more or less valuable information. Many times, I have found that *Wikipedia.de* is better informed when the topic pertains to German issues, figures, or works, than the English-language *Wikipedia.com*. For a quick search about historical facts or dates, this is certainly a practical tool we should not entirely dismiss. But many publishers

or journals still refuse any references to *Wikipedia* and demand more extensive and truly scholarly research citations. However, there we gain excellent access to important visual material often free to use since the images are in the public domain.

Increasingly, articles in *Wikipedia* offer superb bibliographies, although the individual entries continue often to be riddled with mistakes or shortcomings. But there is no online bibliography (or a print version) that can be fully trusted, so double-verification is a must in all basic research work (both in the Humanities and in STEM). When the editor requires that our own bibliography consists of the full information, including all cities where the publisher is located, we often have to authenticate our data and correct it, such as missing book series or volume numbers. I myself find it essential to list all editors of a volume, and the reference to an article must include both the volume and/or fascicle number and the inclusive pages. Many times, inattentive authors simply copy references to build their case and so do not know the full range of data. Hence, moving from an online bibliography such as in a *Wikipedia* article to a reliable reference work, such as the *MLA* bibliography, facilitates the authentication process. Depending on the particular research field, there are then specialized bibliographies. For the Middle Ages, for instance, we can draw also on *Iter*, the *International Medieval Bibliography*, or the *Regesta Imperii*. Relying on *Wikipedia* only often constitutes a considerable risk, hence we still have to back up our references with titles of relevant scholarship (monographs or articles). As a caveat, we currently face the growing challenge by AI and other mechanical tools that insinuate that they can replace a human's efforts to write a scholarly paper. I cannot predict the future, but we know already that AI is going to improve tremendously. What this then will entail for our research in the Humanities or in the STEM field cannot yet be envisioned. This could mean that we as individuals might stop thinking by ourselves. For that reason, it remains crucial that the new generation of scholars fully understands how to utilize all our available bibliographical resources and to argue independently and rationally in favor of their own theses or in support of their analysis.

Finally, writing the abstract for an article or a book publication serves exceedingly well to sharpen our own concept behind our work and forces us to summarize the conclusions in a concise and understandable fashion. This also applies to the title which is the essential label for the entire article. It might not be necessary to state again that one always needs to proofread thoroughly one's manuscript before one submits it to the publisher or editor. Most critically, the correctness of all our primary sources must be confirmed, so double-checking is highly recommended. Finally, it is most advisable to have another pair of eyes read the article because we as the author easily become blind and can no longer see even the most basic mistakes.

Good constructive editors ought to treat each manuscript submission with respect and offer as much criticism as necessary without destroying or rejecting it without much thought. Of course, and here I am speaking as a long-term editor myself (several journals, several book series, handbooks, textbooks, translations, etc.), there can

always be a case when a manuscript was simply sent to a wrong journal, and the rejection then has no direct bearing on the quality of a paper. The author hence must judiciously choose the most appropriate publication forum where the own paper can easily enter into conversation with the current cohort of leading scholars. For instance, in the case of our journal *Humanities* (https://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities), we often receive papers that belong to philosophy, history, art history, or religion. If there is no indication that the author is engaging at least with some narrative material, then we are forced to reject the paper. The same applies to book manuscripts and publishing houses.

Ultimately, there remains one question for all of us. Writing an academic paper, doing all that bibliographical and other research, submitting the paper, getting it rejected, or revising it upon readers' comments, resubmitting it elsewhere, etc. constitutes a lot of work and often involves also pain. Why do we do all that? Why do we teach students and younger scholars how to produce such a research paper that can really be published? The answer is rather simple: In the Academy, we are in the business of producing knowledge, and if we can share our discoveries and new understanding with the public, then this brings joy and offers a sense of pride about this amazing accomplishment. Good research that is then published represents a significant contribution to our society we live in, if not to humanity at large. A solid paper or article that has met with the approval by the readers and the editor represents a major step forward in research, whether incrementally or globally. The author has thus made a noteworthy case, has successfully defended the claim, and reached a convincing conclusion. On that basis, subsequent researchers can expand on their own understanding and reflect critically on the same material or topic of investigation.

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Author Contribution Statement

Albrecht Classen contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing, and validation of the study. Albrecht Classen reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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Not applicable.

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