



Curtin University

# Grey literature

## An introduction

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# What is grey literature?

Grey literature refers to both published and unpublished research material, produced by government, academics, business and industry, that is not controlled by commercial publishers.

# Examples of grey literature

- Government reports
- Statistical publications
- Policy statements
- Working papers
- Research reports
- Fact sheets
- Newsletters
- Theses
- Surveys, interviews & questionnaires
- Conference proceedings
- Conference papers
- Legal documents
- Manuals & handbooks
- Brochures
- Bulletins
- Trial registers
- Datasets
- Discussion papers

# Why consider grey literature for your review?

- It can help address biased reporting of research results (publication bias) and provide a more balanced view of a topic.
- It can be a good source of up-to-date literature for newer areas of research.
- In some topic areas (e.g. social sciences, government policy etc.), a large amount of the evidence is communicated through grey literature<sup>1</sup>.

# Searching for grey literature

- Searching for grey literature is not always easy and can be time consuming.
- Simple searches are often more fruitful than the rigorous strategies used for database searching. Try searching on your core concepts rather than using long strings of search terms.

# Searching for grey literature

Three common methods to consider when searching for grey literature are:

1. Searching websites of relevant organisations
2. Searching databases, catalogues and repositories that index grey literature
3. Using online search engines, such as Google.

# Searching websites of relevant organisations

Search or browse the websites of key organisations in your research area. These may include:

- Government agencies
- Academic or research institutes
- Professional associations
- Advocacy groups.

You are likely to find key organisations through your scoping and background searches.



# Some sources to consider

Depending on the focus of your topic, the following sources may be useful:

- [APO: Analysis and Policy Observatory](#) (Australian)
- [Australian Institute of Health & Welfare](#)
- [australia.gov.au](#)
- [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#)
- [United Nations](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

# Searching library databases for grey literature

As well as journal articles, many library databases also index different types of grey literature including conference papers, reports, theses and other documents. For example:

- [Scopus](#) and [Web of Science](#) index conference papers and technical and other reports.
- [ProQuest](#) indexes dissertations and theses, and conference papers and proceedings.
- [Informit](#) (an Australian database) indexes conference papers and many government documents.

# Limiting by publication type in library databases

Most library databases provide the facility to limit by publication or document type, which will allow you to narrow your search to grey literature sources. For example:

Document type	
<input type="checkbox"/> Article	(6,349) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Conference Paper	(1,348) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Book Chapter	(550) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Review	(403) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Book	(145) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Article in Press	(129) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Conference Review	(59) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Editorial	(53) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Note	(38) >
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter	(14) >

The **Document Type** limits in Scopus

# Searching grey literature databases, catalogues and repositories

## Grey literature databases:

- Specialised databases, such as [Open Grey](#), index grey literature in a number of subject areas.

## Catalogues:

- [Trove](#) is an overarching search interface to search the content of most Australian libraries as well as archives and repositories.

## Repositories:

- Institutional repositories, such as [espace](#) at Curtin, hold digital theses and research papers. [Australasian Open Access Repositories](#) provides a list of research repositories.

# Using online search engines

Online search engines such as Google are also useful when searching for grey literature:

- A simple search for your keywords is often the best approach (e.g. sustainable tourism AND poverty alleviation).
- Google searches will usually return large numbers of results so consider limiting your search by date (e.g. last 5/10 years), language (e.g. English) etc. in [Advanced Search](#).

# Using online search engines

When you perform a Google search you may also want to consider limiting to particular domains or by file type:

- *“Sustainable tourism” AND poverty site:gov.au* will look for Australian government websites with information on sustainable tourism and poverty.
- *“Sustainable tourism” site:org* will look for organisational websites on sustainable tourism.
- *“Sustainable tourism” AND poverty alleviation filetype:pdf* will look for PDFs on sustainable tourism and poverty alleviation.

# Evaluating the quality of grey literature

Grey literature is usually not subject to the same peer-review process or quality checks as books, journals and other commercially published literature.

It is important to critically evaluate grey literature to ensure it is of a suitable quality to include in your literature review.

# AACODS checklist

The [AACODS checklist](#)<sup>2</sup> is a useful tool for evaluating grey literature. AACODS stands for:

- Authority
- Accuracy
- Coverage
- Objectivity
- Date
- Significance



# References

1. Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2016). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
2. Tyndall, J. (2010). AACODS Checklist. Retrieved from <http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/handle/2328/3326>