1. **Accessing Information**

The study of literature demands a rigorous approach to research, one that moves beyond casual internet searches and delves into the rich resources available through academic channels. While general information-gathering strategies are valuable, literary studies require a more specialized toolkit. This guide adapts the principles outlined in "2 Accessing Information" to the specific needs of literature students, demonstrating how to effectively utilize library catalogues, academic databases, and advanced search techniques. By mastering these methods, students can navigate the vast landscape of literary scholarship, ensuring their analyses are well-informed, insightful, and supported by credible evidence.:

**1. Starting with What You Already Have:**

* **Review your knowledge:** Before diving into research, brainstorm what you already know about the author, the literary period, the genre, or any relevant historical or cultural context related to the text you're studying.
* **Consult course materials:**
	+ **Reading list:** Your syllabus will likely list critical editions of the primary text, as well as secondary sources like literary criticism, biographies of the author, or historical background.
	+ **Re-read the primary text:** Actively engage with the text, noting themes, symbols, character development, narrative techniques, etc. Look for passages that puzzle you or that you find particularly compelling.
	+ **References within the text:** Pay attention to any footnotes, endnotes, or bibliographies in your edition of the text. These often point to other relevant works.
	+ **Lecture notes:** Review your notes for any insights your professor has shared about the text, author, or context. They may have recommended specific critical perspectives or authors.

**2. Finding Information in the Library (and Online):**

* **Library catalogue:**
	+ **Author search:** Search for works by the author you're studying, including critical editions, biographies, and collections of letters or essays.
	+ **Title search:** Search for the specific literary work you're studying. Look for different editions and translations.
	+ **Subject/keyword search:** This is crucial for literary research. Use keywords related to themes, literary movements, genres, or critical approaches (e.g., "feminist criticism," "postcolonial literature," "Romantic poetry," "Shakespearean tragedy").
* **Journals:** Literary studies rely heavily on academic journals. Use the library catalogue to find journals specializing in your area of interest (e.g., *Studies in Romanticism*, *Victorian Studies*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*).

**3. Using Databases:**

* **General databases:**
	+ **JSTOR:** A vast database with a strong focus on humanities, including literature. Excellent for finding articles in literary journals.
	+ **Project MUSE:** Another important database for humanities research, often providing full-text access to journals and books.
* **Specialist databases:**
	+ **MLA International Bibliography:** The definitive database for literature, language, linguistics, and folklore. Essential for comprehensive research.
	+ **Literature Online (LION):** Contains primary texts, criticism, and reference works.
	+ **Literature Resource Center:** Provides biographical information, criticism, and overviews of literary works.
* **Accessing databases:** Use your library's website to access these databases. You'll likely need your student credentials.

**4. Advanced Keyword Searches:**

* **Phrases:** Use quotation marks to search for specific phrases from the text or critical concepts (e.g., "the sublime," "unreliable narrator," "stream of consciousness").
* **Truncation:**
	+ **Example:** "Shakespear\*" will find results for Shakespeare, Shakespearean, Shakespeare's, etc.
	+ **Example:** "feminis\*" will find feminism, feminist, etc.
	+ **Example:** "gothic\*" will find gothic, gothics, etc.
* **Boolean operators:**
	+ **AND:** "Hamlet" AND "revenge" will find articles discussing revenge in Hamlet.
	+ **OR:** "Romanticism" OR "Romantic poetry" will broaden your search to include both terms.
	+ **NOT:** "Gothic" NOT "architecture" will exclude articles about gothic architecture and focus on the literary genre.

**5. Making the Most of the Library:**

* **Specialist librarians:** Consult with a humanities or literature librarian. They can guide you to relevant resources, help you refine your search strategies, and suggest databases you might not be aware of.
* **Literary studies guides:** Many libraries create subject-specific guides for literature, often available online. These guides provide valuable information on key resources and research methods.

**6. Using the Internet for Research (with Caution):**

* **Specialized search engines:**
	+ **Google Scholar:** Can be useful for finding scholarly articles, but always verify the credibility of the source. Look for publications in reputable journals or from university presses.
* **Author websites:** Some authors maintain websites with biographical information, bibliographies, and even unpublished works.
* **Online literary magazines:** Some literary magazines publish criticism and reviews online.
* **Evaluating sources:** Be extremely critical of online sources. Look for:
	+ **Author expertise:** Is the author a recognized scholar in the field?
	+ **Reputable publisher:** Is the work published by a university press or a respected academic journal?
	+ **Evidence of bias:** Is the information presented objectively, or does it reflect a particular agenda?
	+ **Citations:** Does the author properly cite their sources?

**Specific Examples for Literature Studies:**

* **Researching Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:**
	+ **Keywords:** "Hamlet," "Shakespeare," "revenge tragedy," "Elizabethan drama," "psychoanalytic criticism," "feminist criticism."
	+ **Databases:** MLA International Bibliography, JSTOR, Project MUSE.
	+ **Library catalogue:** Search for different editions of *Hamlet*, critical studies of the play, biographies of Shakespeare, and books on Elizabethan theater.
* **Analyzing a poem by Emily Dickinson:**
	+ **Keywords:** "Emily Dickinson," "American poetry," "19th-century literature," "death," "nature," "religion."
	+ **Databases:** MLA International Bibliography, JSTOR, Literature Online.
	+ **Library catalogue:** Search for collections of Dickinson's poetry, biographies, and critical essays on her work.

**Key Takeaways for Literature:**

* **The MLA International Bibliography is your best friend.**
* **Become proficient in using library resources and databases.**
* **Develop strong keyword search skills.**
* **Always evaluate the credibility of your sources, especially online.**
* **Consult with literature librarians for expert guidance.**
* **Combine close reading of the primary text with thorough research in secondary sources.**
* **Start with your syllabus and any materials provided by your professor.**
* **Take advantage of any available training sessions offered by your university library.**
* **Don't be afraid to ask for help!** Librarians are there to assist you with your research.

By applying these principles, you can conduct thorough and effective research in your literature studies, leading to insightful and well-supported essays and analyses.