USCAnnenberg
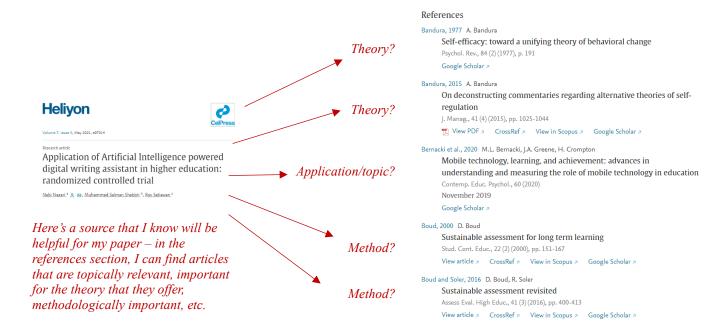School for Communication
and Journalism

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Finding Secondary Sources Online

The internet will surely be the end of us all, but while it's around you should get good at using it for research. If you ever have trouble finding resources for your papers (navigating results on the library website, getting too much garbage, not finding enough sources, figuring out whether a source is reliable or not, etc.) try these techniques. -TM
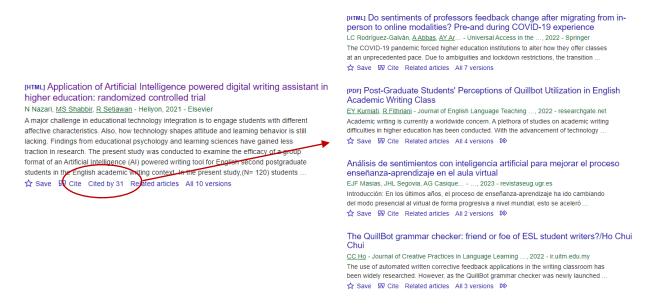
Working Forwards and Backwards

If you're looking for scholarly/secondary sources for a paper that you are writing, it is likely that you have a source or two that you like but are trying to find more. In that case, a lot of the hard work has already been done for you. Peer-reviewed academic articles usually end with a references page or bibliography (if the one you have doesn't, look back through the article to see how they cite their sources, and if you don't see any citations, check in with your professor about whether or not this piece is appropriate to use for your assignment). Scanning through the bibliography will let you know what articles this author thought were important for their topic, so in all likelihood, some of them might be useful for your paper now. Look for articles that could be helpful to you in different ways, too—it doesn't just have to be a topical similarity:

But looking in the references section of a paper can only let you look back in time. What if you want to see more recent sources?

Using Google Scholar (tbh, most academic databases let you do this, but it's easiest in GS) you can move forward in time to find sources that cited the source you already have. This lets you see how a scholarly conversation has developed beyond the source that you like. Just click on the "Cited by" link underneath your article on the Google Scholar results page:

USC Research Guides

If you don't have a source to start with, or if you want to broaden your search beyond the sources you already have, you might want to directly search the scholarly databases that USC has on hand. The best way to do this is to use the curated research guides on the library's website. Ignore the search bar on the front page of the library's website!