What is grey literature?

Grey Literature is "information produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body."


Some examples of grey literature include:

- government reports & white papers
- Social Media such as tweets.
- policy statements
- memoranda
- market reports
- newsletters and bulletin
- fact sheets
- conference proceedings and symposium reports
- working papers
- research summaries
- issues papers
- pre-prints of articles
- dissertations

Why search grey literature?

Grey literature is often a good source of up-to-date research and may provide additional information to inform your understanding of a topic. Searching the grey literature may also ensure a comprehensiveness of searching that is desirable to avoid publication bias. As with other types of information, it is necessary to critically evaluate grey literature to ensure that it is of high quality.

How to find grey literature

Library databases:

Many library catalogues and databases will contain grey literature sources, and grey literature will be retrieved as part of your search results. Databases may be especially useful for locating difficult-to-find grey literature such as unpublished conference papers and theses.

Search for experts:

Often individuals have their own website, or a profile on an institutional or organisational website. This profile page may list publications by that author, as well as contact details for contacting them personally.

Search organisation websites:

Organisations websites may include reports or fact sheets, or have a “related links” option which may lead you to other relevant web pages. Many organisations websites list their publications or archives of publications. eg. WHO (World Health Organisation) http://www.who.int/en/

Search institutional repositories:

Some institutions may have repositories that contain grey literature in the form of academic publications, working papers and theses. eg. Lancaster University’s E-Prints repository http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/

Search using Internet search engines:

Search engines such as Google provide an easy way to find grey literature that is available online.