

Citation Chaining

Let's say you've found the perfect article for your paper; it supports your argument and provides you with background information. One article isn't enough for your assignment, but you're not quite sure where else to look. Citation chaining is a research strategy that helps you find sources that cite each other. A chain is formed because one resource cites another, which cites another and is cited by yet another. It allows you to track the development of key findings and arguments over time.

Citation chaining allows you to identify key authors, publications, and journals in your area of study, and understand how researchers are building on and sometimes challenging one another's work. It provides insight into the scholarly conversation surrounding your research topic.

Backward citation chaining involves reviewing your perfect article's reference list and investigating those sources. This is done to learn about what has been previously said about a topic, and to identify the key works related to your area of study.

Forward citation chaining is the process of looking at works that have cited your resource. These resources will allow you to explore new findings and ideas about your topic. Of course, this isn't as simple as just checking the bibliography, but some library databases will indicate the number of times a given article has been cited. Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar are all great resources for forward citation chaining.

Exclusively using citation chaining to locate resources can be limiting and can keep you from discovering other valuable research.

Additionally, be aware that not all citations are created equal. Scholars draw on and engage with each other's work in many ways. Some resources are casually mentioned, while others are explored more deeply. By simply looking at a bibliography, or a citation counter, you will not be able to tell which articles will be relevant to you. You will need to think critically about the resources in your chain, and judge whether they are useful to you.

Citation chaining is a great way to get a feel for your topic and find related publications, especially if you are just starting out in academic writing. It should, however, just be one tool in your research toolbox.

Please remember that library staff are here to help you at every stage of your research process. If the library does not have access to an article you've discovered in your chain, we can usually borrow it for you from another university.

Visit the library website, or come visit us at a Service Desk.