How Library Stuff Works Videos: Searching as Strategic Exploration

If I asked you to gather information resources on the topic of online privacy, where would you go?
Perhaps the obvious answer is the library, this is a library video after all
And it's true, the library is home to a wide variety of information resources, such as books and periodicals
But the library is not a one-stop shop that is able to fill all of your information needs with a simple press of a button
Instead, searching must be viewed as a strategic exploration, where we are responsible for identifying and accessing a wide variety of information sources

So, how can you begin this strategic exploration?
A good first step is defining the scope of the task
What about online privacy are we interested in?
Developing a research question is a really useful way to do this. An example of a research question on the topic of online privacy is
"How do search engines collect data from their users and what are the associated privacy implications?"

Now that we have determined the scope of our project, we need to identify interested parties, such as organizations, scholars, governments and industries that may have created information that could be useful to us. So for our topic, we might want to explore Canadian policies or safeguards that protect citizen's online privacy, such as the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). Or explore organizations, such as the Library Freedom Project, that advocate for citizen privacy. It may also be useful to read the privacy policies of search engines themselves, such as Google, Bing and DuckDuckGo.

After we have identified the kinds of resources that might be relevant to our topic, we have to create a strategy to access them
For scholarly articles, the library databases are probably our best bet. If you are unfamiliar with how to use these databases, be sure to check out the "How Library Stuff Works Videos" filed under "Research". To effectively search databases we must use keywords with impact, link our keywords with Boolean operators, and apply appropriate limiters. But the most important trick is to remain flexible, persistent and think creatively when our search doesn't work out. When this happens, reflect on the search and ask, "Why wasn't my search effective, and how can I modify it to retrieve different results?"

For information sources such as government and organizational reports, the information retrieval process can become a little bit trickier.
We refer to these kind of information sources as "Grey Literature", because they are not published through the traditional models, like books and journal articles are. Consulting a library research guide can be a useful way to get started, or running a few searches through a generalized search engine.

You are bound to face challenges throughout the searching process, but remaining persistent

despite these challenges is the key to searching success.

And remember, librarians are here to help! We can help you brush up on your database searching skills, or assist you in creating a plan to tackle that mysterious grey literature. Book a research consultation with us using the link provided in the description below.

Happy Searching!