

Grey Literature

Definition of Grey Literature

Grey literature is information “produced on all levels of government, academia, business, and industry in electronic and print formats...not controlled by commercial publishers; i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.”¹

Retrievability and Credibility of Information Sources

Information sources exist along a spectrum of **retrievability** and **credibility**, ranging from informal, ephemeral content to peer-reviewed academic literature.²

Grey Literature Spectrum

- Lowest Retrievability & Credibility: Informal digital communications and personal social media channels, including Blogs, Emails, and Instagram posts.
- Moderate-Low Retrievability & Credibility: Corporate and popular media communications, such as Annual reports, News articles, and Company reports.
- Moderate-High Retrievability & Credibility: Policy-focused and organizational publications, including NGO studies, Government reports, and Think tank reports.
- Highest Retrievability & Credibility: Formal, peer-reviewed academic research, including Scholarly journals, Academic books, and Book chapters.

Examples of Grey Literature

- Theses and dissertations
- Conference proceedings
- Unpublished articles, and data
- Statistical publications
- Regulatory information from regulatory bodies
- Online handbooks for implementing a specific program
- Government documents and reports
- Non-profit, NGO, or think tank reports

These are just a few examples, [GreyNet's list](#) shows more examples of grey literature.

¹ Schöpfel, J.; Farace, D.J. (2010). "Grey Literature". In Bates, M.J.; Maack, M.N. (eds.). Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences (3rd ed.). Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press. pp. 2029–2039.

² Adams, R. J., Smart, P., & Huff, A. S. (2017). Shades of Grey: Guidelines for Working with the Grey Literature in Systematic Reviews for Management and Organizational Studies. International Journal of Management Reviews : IJMR, 19(4), 432–454. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12102>

Why Search for Grey Literature?

- Captures emerging research and "niche" topics
- Includes diverse perspectives and practical knowledge
- Can lead to more current information

Searching for Grey Literature is considered a best practice or mandatory part of a systematic review.³

How to Search for Grey Literature

There is no single database that covers grey literature well, so Google (NOT Google Scholar) is helpful in cases like this. Some helpful search tips:

- limit to domain
 - site:ca, site:edu
- limit to document type
 - filetype:pdf, filetype:pptx
- think how a document might phrase something, enclose that in quotes
 - ["music therapy" intervention palliative site:ca filetype:pdf](#)

How to Search for Grey Literature in Library databases

- Filter Document Types: Select Technical Reports, Conference Proceedings, Working Papers, Government Documents, or Dissertations
- Limit Search Fields: Target Title or Abstract instead of Full Text
- Use Broad Phrasing: Combine flexible terms, truncation, and Booleans (e.g., (report* OR "working paper*") AND "climate policy")
- Uncheck Peer-Reviewed: Remove Peer-Reviewed or Scholarly limiters to show grey materials
- Mine Bibliographies: Scan reference lists of relevant documents to find additional source material

Questions?

Ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus

³ Paez, A. (2017). Gray literature: An important resource in systematic reviews. *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine*, 10(3), 233–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jebm.12266>