

## How to Research an Information Product

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Do you want to know the key to creating a great information product?

It's this: **You need to start by doing great research.**

Problem is, plenty of would-be writers and product creators really don't know how to properly research a product. Worse yet, some of the advice given on marketing forums could land you in legal hot water.

That's because research is NOT about copying and pasting content and then "rewriting" it to create your product.

If you've ever heard that advice before, I want you to put it out of your head right now. Forget about it. Shun it. Don't even think about trying to use that advice to create your next product, unless you like the idea of spending the next few years and tens of thousands of dollars fighting off copyright cases in court.

So what should you do instead?

Read this report! Because in just a few minutes –

**You'll discover the simple five-step process for researching  
your next information product the RIGHT way.**

Not only will this process make researching your product a breeze but it will also help ensure you have a factually accurate, useful and original product!

I'll get to those five steps in just a moment. But first, let's go over the basic rules every product creator ought to know...

## *Understand the Golden Rules of Good Research*

You've got a topic in hand. You've probably created a rough outline so that you know what to research. But before you jump in, I'd like you to read, understand and use these three rules of good research...

### *Rule 1: Use Credible Sources*

Just about anyone can stick a site up on the internet. Some of these sites will even look impressively professional, credible and trustworthy. If you were to judge these sites just based on appearances alone, you'd assume they were credible.

Yet people can say anything they want about their qualifications. They can say anything they want about the topic – even if it's completely inaccurate or even fraudulent. Some people do it because they confuse their facts as opinions. Others do it because they're lazy in their own research. And others do it intentionally for whatever reason.

That's why you need to stick with credible sources only. Here's what I'm referring to:

- **News sites.**

These are known journalistic sites like the New York Times, the BBC, CNN, the Washington Post and a whole host of others. There are perhaps thousands of these sites online. Just be sure you're looking at factual articles from journalists, as opposed to the editorial (opinion) pages of these sites.

- **Academic and research journals.**

You can find these scholarly articles here: <http://scholar.google.com/>.

A word of warning: Some people attach the name "journal" to their sites and publications in hopes that their information appears more credible. The

journals I'm referring to are well-known journals such as the Journal of Psychology or the Journal of Exercise Physiology.

The key here is that the journal is full of scientific research from university professors and other qualified researchers. And better yet, the journal should be "peer reviewed" – that means that other professors and researchers review the studies and papers contained within each issue of the journal.

- **University sites.**

Yet another good place to get good information is from university websites.

Tip: Keep in mind that only recognized educational institutions get the .edu extension on their domain name. So if you're looking at two sites – one called Harvard.com and the other Harvard.edu -- ignore the .com name and go to the .edu site because that's the official university site.

Keep the following two points in mind:

1. **Visit credible university sites online.** Not every .edu website contains credible information. That's why you need to focus on websites from known institutions like Harvard, Yale, Cambridge, the University of Chicago, MIT, Stanford, Oxford, Princeton and so on.

Avoid universities and schools that you've never heard of, especially those that offer online courses only.

2. **Refer to credible pages only.** Keep in mind that many universities offer their students a free web page on the university's website.

Example: You might see a Harvard.edu web page but the page could just be a student's personal page. These pages aren't monitored nor reviewed by anyone. Thus these pages aren't any

different than some unknown person putting up a blog at LiveJournal.com.

Point is, make sure the pages you're reading were created directly by professors, researchers or other known experts in the field. Usually there's some indication on the page about who wrote it, such as a byline at the end of an article that includes a professor's name, credentials and department.

- **Other known authority sites.**

No matter what niche you're in, there are probably several known authority sites in your niche. These are sites that you know will always give you good information.

Example: If you're writing about health topics, then you can get good information from hospital sites (like the Mayo Clinic site) as well as known authority sites like WebMD.com. You might also visit the online version of notable print publications, such as Health magazine's health.com website.

- **Sites from known experts.**

Finally, you can also visit the individual sites of known experts in the field.

Example: If you wanted to learn about dog training, you might visit the site belonging to Cesar Milan (the Dog Whisperer). Or if you wanted to know about bodybuilding, you could visit sites belonging to the men who've recently won Mr. Olympia competitions.

### *Rule 2: Refer to Multiple Sources*

The point here is that you can't just visit one credible site, grab the information and create your product. There are two problems with this:

- 1. You won't get the full picture.** Common sense right? If you just go to one source, the author probably left bits and pieces of information out. And if you're not very familiar with the topic, you may not even realize anything is missing. Thus you'll pass on bad, incomplete information to your readers.

Point is, go to multiple sources in order to learn as much about the topic as possible. Just be sure all these sources are indeed credible.

- 2. Your product might sound like the source.** If you read just one source and then start writing, that one source is going to be floating through your head. Even if you take notes on this source and close your browser window, it's still going to be there in your head, fresh as ever. And that means you're likely to structure your writing in a way that looks very familiar to that source.

Instead, go to multiple sources and read a LOT of information on the topic. Then the topic will become yours. You'll become the expert. And that makes it easier for you to write from scratch, completely in your own words, without even a hint of being influenced by any single source.

So what do I mean by "multiple" sources?

Well, let's say you're writing a short section, such as 1000 words, on a sub-topic in your report. You should read and absorb at least three to six sources before you write this section.

Yes, that means that by the time you're finished with your product, you'll likely have consulted dozens of sources. That's a good thing.

### *Rule 3: Separate Fact from Opinion*

I alluded to this just a bit earlier. Certain sites (like news sites) actually have separate editorial pages.

Sometimes the authors of these articles even state their opinions as facts, as a means of swaying you to their side of the argument. And likewise, sometimes you'll even see researchers or known experts stating opinions as facts, perhaps as a means of further establishing themselves as leaders in the field.

When you research your product, you want to stick with known facts. But in order to do this, you need to be able to tell fact from opinion. Here's how:

- **Look for evidence to support claims.** If a person makes a questionable claim and then cites a credible source, such as a scholarly article, then go directly to the scholarly source to verify the facts.

- **Keep an eye out for generalizations, exaggerations and hype.**

Example: If you see "black and white" statements such as "All dieters do this..." or "NO dog will ever do this...", then it might be opinion. Truth is, things aren't always so black and white in the real world, as exceptions do exist.

- **Check multiple sources.** Again, if you're checking multiple credible sources, then it will become clear to you what's opinion and what's fact.

OK, now that you know the three golden rules of research, let's get down to the task of actually doing the research...

### *Research Your Product in Five Easy Steps*

If you don't yet have an outline for your product, then you're actually going to go through these research steps twice. Specifically:

1. **Do general research.** Let's say you want to create a product about bodybuilding. If you don't know anything about bodybuilding, then you're going to need to research the topic, in general, just to be able to create a basic outline. In other words, you're going to read all sorts of articles and other information that give you an overview of bodybuilding.

Once you have your general outline created, then you move on to the second phase...

2. **Do specific research.** Now you need to research all the specific topics and sub-topics on your outline.

So, to continue with our bodybuilding example, you'd need to now research the various chapters of your product, such as bodybuilding nutrition. You'd then look even more closely at your sub-topics, such as the importance of protein for bodybuilders, the importance of water, the importance of meal timing and so on.

Tip: As you do this research, you'll become more familiar with the topic. That means that your original outline will likely get expanded a bit, because you'll become familiar with the broad range of topics you need to address in order to adequately cover your topic.

So whether you're doing "phase 1" or "phase 2" research, the actual five-step process is still the same. Here's how to do it...



## *Step 1: Google Multiple Search Words*

You can start your search in Google, since this will help you uncover a wide range of sources. But again, just be sure that you're focusing on getting your materials from credible sources.

The key to getting good results is to input a wide variety of search terms, which should result in you seeing a wider variety of sites.

Example: Let's suppose you wanted to research weight loss for your upcoming product. And for starters, perhaps you just want to get an overview of the topic, so for the moment you're just searching words related to weight loss. Here's an example of the variety of related words you'd want to input into Google:

- Weight loss
- Lose weight
- Diet (dieting)
- Lose fat
- Cut fat
- Burn fat
- Dieting and exercise
- Low calorie diet
- Get rid of fat
- Burn calories
- How to lose weight
- How to diet

And so on. The more variety you introduce into your search terms, the more variety you'll get in the results.



Example: Let me give you another example. Let's suppose you're researching how to housetrain a puppy. You might look up these terms:

- Housetraining
- Housebreaking
- Housetraining a puppy
- Housetraining a dog
- Housebreaking a puppy
- Housebreaking a dog
- Potty training a puppy
- Potty training a dog
- Kennel training a puppy
- Kennel training a dog
- Paper training a puppy
- Paper training a dog
- How to housetrain a puppy
- How to housebreak a dog

And so on – once again, you can see that a wide variety of search terms will introduce a wider variety of information and research to you.

Tip: If you want even more sites and references, then input these same search terms into another search engine, such as Yahoo!, which will give you just slightly different results.

Sometimes people or institutions provide great (credible) information but perhaps they're just not very good getting at getting ranked well in the search engines. That's why you should always dig beyond the first page or two of Google and do some deep research (several pages in). And that's also why you should take a look at the paid (sponsored) ads which appear at the top and along the right side of the regular results.

On the other side of the coin, you may find that some sites rank well in Google for the search terms you're inputting. However, do NOT confuse good rankings with good information. Do not confuse top sites for authority sites.

Take a site like [EzineArticles.com](http://EzineArticles.com) for example. This site is an article directory. The articles tend to be better written than some directories, simply because real human editors look at the articles before accepting them into the directory. However, that doesn't mean that these articles are fact-checked. And so you can definitely get some bogus information from these sorts of sites. Point is, unless you KNOW the author is an expert in the field, don't bother even reading these articles.

Another site you'll see come up a lot in your research is [Wikipedia.com](http://Wikipedia.com). This is a good starting point to get an overview of the topic but you should NOT depend on this site. That's because it's member-written and moderated. That means that anyone – even you or I – could go into the site and write an article about a topic.

Now most of the time the members are very conscientious. If they see that someone has provided false information, they'll change it. If they see that the information is unsupported, they'll ask for people to provide proof or evidence. But nonetheless, you need to always keep in mind that the people who created the articles are NOT necessarily experts on the topic.

You'll note that I did mention that Wikipedia can be a good starting place. That's because many article authors DO cite their references. So if you scan down to the bottom of any article, you'll likely find links to authority sites, such as a link to a scholarly article, an expert's site or another credible reference.

Tip: Just be sure you go to these sites directly and read the information, rather than relying on a Wikipedia author's interpretation of the information.

## *Step 2: Review Scholarly Journals*

As mentioned in the Golden Rules of Research at the beginning of the report, you need to turn to scholarly journals whenever possible.

Let me give you a listing of places you can find information about these journals:

- <http://www.elsevier.com>
- <http://www.academicjournals.org/>
- <http://www.jstor.org/>
- <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/>
- <http://www.doaj.org>
- <http://scholar.google.com/>

Tip: If you have access to a university library's online catalog, then you can also start your research there. These catalogs should contain separate databases where you can search for academic and research journals. Best of all, if you can't find the full journal article online, you can run to the library and get yourself a photocopy of it.

Now maybe you're thinking that your product is pretty basic, maybe even a "how to" report, so you can't really imagine why you'd need to reference and cite scholarly journals.

Well, for starters, it makes your product more credible. It shows you're willing to go the extra mile to provide good information for your readers. And it establishes you as a trustworthy expert in your readers' eyes.

You can see why it's important. But perhaps you're still wondering how you'd include scholarly works in your particular product. So let me give you some examples...

### Examples:

- You're writing a dieting report. You can cite research articles which talk about how caffeine affects weight loss.
- You're creating a product about dog training. You can cite research which talks about how dogs perceive the world differently from us and how that affects the way you must train them.
- You're writing a report about organic gardening. You can cite research which talks about the harmful effects of using traditional, harsh insecticides and herbicides on plants.
- You want to write a report about online marketing. You might open your report with statistics from economists regarding the state of the current economy as well as forecasts for the near future.

See what I mean?

No matter what your topic, there's a good chance that you can indeed use scholarly works to support and expand on your information. And in particular, these journals are good places to turn to when you need statistics, hard facts and other data.

### *Step 3: Check Other Credible Sources*

Your Google search and search of academic articles likely put plenty of good information in front of you. It probably also made you aware of many of the experts in your niche. Now your next step is to go to other sources, like [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), and see if these known experts have published books on the topic.

The good thing about going to Amazon.com is that many books are already printed in the Kindle marketplace. So if you have a Kindle device, then you can buy, download and start reading the book immediately – no waiting for the book to come by mail.

You'll note that I said you should see if any known experts have published books. That point is important. That's because self-publishing is very easy these days. All one has to do is go to Lulu.com, CreateSpace.com or countless other self-publishing sites to get their book published.

Problem is, self-published work doesn't go through any type of filter. There's no publishing house checking it for quality. There probably isn't a fact-checker or editor of any kind. Thus anyone can self-publish a book. And indeed, many people do it for the sole reason for establishing credibility in their niche.

My point here is that you should not confuse having a published book with being an expert in the field. That simply isn't the case anymore. That's why you should only pay attention to published books from credible experts and other known authors.

Example: "Jim Bob the Dog Trainer" has a physical book for sale on Amazon.com. If you've never heard of Jim Bob, then skip it. Instead, buy a book from a known dog-training expert, like Cesar Milan.

Tip: Kindle also carries many magazine titles on its device, so you can also turn to credible magazines for information. But again, the word "credible" is the key. Stick with long-established magazines that are known for publishing solid information. For example, Readers Digest may not be a scholarly magazine but they do publish articles from known experts, such as Dr. Oz.

### *Step 4: Takes Notes*

At this point you should have a wide variety of information and references laid out in front of you for your various topics and subtopics.

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, you need to be very careful that you do *not* merely “rewrite” any of your sources.

Listen, I’m not a lawyer, so if you want to discuss this further, I suggest you chat with your own attorney about this topic. However, the point I want to make is that merely “rewriting” someone else’s content does NOT keep you safe from the long arm of the law.

Example: Think “derivative works” here. If I wrote a story about a boy wizard named Larry Cotter, you can bet J.K. Rowling’s attorneys would descend on me like vultures on a carcass. No, I didn’t name the book Harry Potter. But if it’s clear that I’m using Rowling’s work, you can bet I’ll get a cease and desist (if I’m lucky) or I’ll get dragged into court.

The reason I bring this up is because some “writers” offer the advice that all you need to do to be safe is rewrite your source so that it “passes Copyscape” (which refers to [Copyscape.com](https://www.copyscape.com)). But that’s not always true. You can get slapped for plagiarism even if your writing “passes Copyscape”.

Sounds a bit tricky, right? And a bit hard to interpret.

So that’s why I suggest you totally forget about any idea of merely “rewriting” someone else’s work. Instead, the goal of all of this research is for you to become an expert of sorts on the topic. You need to read, absorb and fully understand the topic. Because once you know the topic inside and out, then you can simply write about it off the top of your head, completely in your own words.

Now, in order to get to that point, you’ll need to do two things:

1. **Research multiple sources.** I mentioned this earlier. But the fact is, the more you read on your topic, the better you’ll understand this topic. You’ll have a deeper understanding, rather than just “getting by” with enough knowledge.



2. **Take notes.** By this I mean you take actual notes. You can open up a fresh word processor and type in these notes. You can also use a tool like Dragon Naturally Speaking, which converts your speech to text. Or if you like to do it the old fashioned way, you can even take notes by hand.

Whatever you do, however, do NOT create your notes by merely copying and pasting other people's work. The idea here is to read your references, think about them and then type or write your notes in your OWN words.

You see, you're going to create your product completely in your own words – so you might as well start by writing your notes in your own words. Plus, writing out notes on a topic helps you remember and process this information. And that means that you'll gain that deeper understanding that I talked about above.

Tip: Another good way to really understand material is to teach it to someone else. So if you're not much of a note taker, no problem. Just sit a friend down and "teach" this person all about the topic. Be sure to encourage your friend to ask questions because this will help you discover the gaps in your research.

As you're taking notes, I want you to really THINK about the topic. As you do so, take notes about other things you could include in your product, such as:

- **Examples to help clarify complex concepts.** These are your OWN examples, not examples you read anywhere else.
- **Stories to make the content more memorable.** You can tell a story about yourself, you can tell a story about a fictional character, you can even tell a well-known story (such as a Bible parable or a storyline from a movie) to help clarify a concept or even make a point.



Just don't tell the same stories you read somewhere else. Instead, think for yourself – what kind of story could you tell to help drive your point home?

Example: If you're creating a weight loss report, then you might retell the well-known story of the "Tortoise and the Hare." Then you can tie this story into weight loss, saying that "slow and steady wins the race" when it comes to dieting too.

- **Tips to add value to the content.** Again, the key here is to think up your own tips, not those you read elsewhere. This is easiest if you have some personal experience with the topic you're writing about.

Example: If you're writing about healthy eating, then you may share your tips on what food substitutes are actually worth trying and which ones can mess up a recipe.

Got it? The key here is independent thinking.

Make this information yours, and you'll come up with a completely unique product, one that your readers might happily describe as fresh and original!

But you're not quite ready to write just yet. Read on...

### *Step 5: Interview Experts*

If you want to truly have a "fresh and original" product, one that really stands out from the competitors' products – then you'll definitely want to take this step of interviewing experts.

Think about it: You don't have to rely on the information that's already floating around the web. Instead, you can get fresh information, directly from the experts who're working in the field every day.

Here's what types of experts I'm talking about:

- **Known experts.** These are the people who're already well-known, credible experts in the niche. These are the folks that have the most popular blogs, books, white papers and other information. These are the folks who're working in the niche every day – and your target market would probably recognize the names of these experts.
- **Researchers and scholars.** These are the university professors, doctors and researchers who're writing the scholarly articles you found during the course of your research.
- **Authority figures.** These people don't necessarily have known names but they are experts and authority figures nonetheless.

Example: If you're writing a book about a health topic, then you might interview a doctor. Or if you're writing about personal safety, you might interview a police officer.

- **People with good credentials.** These are people who are uniquely qualified to talk about a certain subject, usually because they've had success in the field. They may even have a related degree or won awards.

Example: If you were creating a report about how to publish a book, then interviewing successfully published authors is a good move. Or if you want to write a book about bodybuilding, then interview people who've won bodybuilding competitions. Or if you want to write about gardening, then interview the gardeners in the "Master Gardener" group in your local area.

Get the point? You just need to find people who have plenty of experience and success in the field. Here's how to find and approach these folks...

## a. Find the Experts

If you've already completed the first three steps in this report, then you have your initial list of experts. These are the authors of all the credible articles, scholarly papers, books, blogs and other expert information.

However, you don't have to limit yourself to these folks.

Instead, think local. Who in your local area can you contact? This person doesn't even need to have a web presence, a published book or anything else. He or she just needs to be an authority figure or person who's uniquely qualified to discuss the topic (as mentioned above).

Let me give you a few more examples:

- If you're writing a book about the entrepreneur mindset, then talk to local business owners in your area.
- If you're writing a book about dogs, interview veterinarians, dog trainers, groomers, breeders and those who manage rescue shelters.
- If you're writing a book about yoga, interview a yoga instructor. You might also interview a doctor (perhaps a holistic doctor) to discuss the health benefits of yoga.

Point is, there are experts all around you, both online and offline.

## b. Request an Interview

The reason I ask you to consider a variety of experts is because not everyone will say yes to your request.

Indeed, those experts who DO have an online presence and/or a popular book are likely to get inundated with requests.

People want to interview them. They want these experts to use their social influence to promote the requester's product, etc. You may even have a hard time reaching them directly, as they'll have "gate keepers" set up to filter all the requests.

On the flip side, your local yoga instructor or veterinarians probably aren't slammed with interview requests. Yes, these folks are busy with their own businesses and their own lives but getting an interview request is a fairly novel thing. It's actually quite flattering, which makes it all the more likely that this person will say yes.

Regardless of whether you're requesting an interview from the biggest expert in your niche or the small-town business, you need to keep the following in mind: Consider using something other than email to make that initial contact.

You see, people get lots of email. And the big experts in your niche get lots of requests by email. Thus a request coming through another channel often gets more attention.

This "other channel" might include the postal mail, the telephone, Facebook, a private message on a forum or something else that may have less "noise" than email.

Tip: If you want to interview someone locally, then pick up the phone or stop by in person to make your interview request.

Let me give you a sample message you might send to this person. This sample will also give you an idea of what to say on the phone:

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Subject line: I'd like to interview you, [name]

Alternative subject line: I'd like to feature you in an upcoming book

Dear [first name],

Hello, my name is [your name] and I'm writing a book about [describe topic here]. Since you're a well-known expert in the field of [niche description], I'd like to interview you to get your thoughts about [specific topic].

In exchange for about 10-15 minutes of your time, you'll get a byline within the book, which will list your name and website.

You can also use this exposure to further build your own credibility, since you'll have an interview published in a reputable book.

We can do the interview via email or on the phone, whichever is better for you.

You can reply to this email or call me at [phone number] to let me know your preference or to ask any questions you might have.

I look forward to hearing from you!

[Your name]  
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**One note:** If YOU have some type of credentials that would make it more likely that someone would say yes to your interview request, then be sure to mention these credentials.

Examples:

- Are you a former journalist?
- Are you already known in the niche, such as by publishing a popular blog?
- Have you already published a book in the niche?
- Have you already interviewed other experts in the niche?

Also, note that the above sample email accomplishes the following:

➤ **Gets to the point quickly.**

Your interviewee doesn't need to know your entire life story. Yes, you should mention facts that add to your credibility. However, you need to get to the point as quickly as possible and let the person know why you're contacting him or her.

➤ **Allows the interviewee know what's in it for him or her.**

The interviewee is likely to feel flattered just for being asked to do an interview. But you also want to let him know what else he gets, such as byline in the book, extra publicity, etc. Maybe you'll even offer something extra, like publishing his entire interview on your blog.

➤ **Makes it easy for the interviewee to say yes.**

First off, you don't want to take up too much of your interviewee's time. As you'll note above, the email requests 10 or 15 minutes. That should be enough to get a few solid questions answered.

Secondly, you should give your interviewee a choice of doing the interview by phone or email. Some people hate talking on the phone. Some people hate typing. So let your experts choose their preferred method.

Overall, just remember that this person is doing YOU a favor. So be courteous, professional and polite in all your dealings with this person. That applies even if the person turns your interview request down.

### **c. Follow Up With Your Interviewee**

For those who do agree to your request, be sure to always follow up with a thank you. An email thank you is okay if the person has a presence predominantly online. But if this is a local expert, then drop a thank you card in the mail.

Before you complete your product, show the relevant section to your interviewee. This includes the interview itself (where applicable, if you intend to present it nearly as-is) or how you summarized your interview with the expert. (This would be the case if you're taking a more journalistic perspective.) It also includes the expert's byline. You'll want to get approval for all of this before you publish your product.

Finally, once the product is complete, be sure to send all your interviewees a complimentary copy of the book. Do take this opportunity to once again thank your interviewee for agreeing to do the interview.

Now let's wrap things up...



## Conclusion

And there you have it – the golden rules of research plus my proven five-step process for researching an information product online.

Let's quickly recap these simple steps:

**Step 1: Google Multiple Search Terms.** You want to use multiple, credible sources. And one way to find multiple sources is to start your search with multiple (related) search terms.

**Step 2: Review Scholarly Journals.** Preferably, keep yourself focused on peer-reviewed journals with research coming from established universities and other centers of research (like hospitals).

**Step 3: Refer to Other Sources.** This includes paid products, such as books from experts on Amazon.

**Step 4: Take Notes.** The key here is to think independently about what you're reading. This starts by taking notes in your own words and adding in your own examples, tips and stories.

**Step 5: Interview Experts.** Finally, you can make your product really stand out by interviewing experts.

That's your complete blueprint to doing your research the RIGHT way so you end up with a fresh product.

Now there's only one thing left for you to do – put this blueprint to work immediately!