# Grey literature - a guide for researchers

Grey literature is produced by governments, companies, charities and other organisations, rather than by commercial publishers. It's an extremely useful way of gaining a deeper insight into a subject.
It includes:-

- Reports (including working papers, briefings, discussion papers and white papers) produced by government departments, local authorities, international agencies, public sector agencies, charities, academics, business, industry and other organisations
- Government policy
- Conference posters and presentations
- Clinical trials
- Protocols and guidelines
- Standards, patents, technical specifications
- Market reports
- Statistical resources
- Newsletters
- Technical notes and specifications
- Social media, such as Twitter or Facebook may also be classed as a form of grey literature, depending on the author. (e.g. a post on a company's official social media channel may be grey literature, whereas anonymous posts are not).

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## Why look at grey literature?

Grey literature should be used in addition to academic research.  It can offer many things -

- New findings and research can appear in grey literature (e.g. in working papers) before they are formally published in peer-reviewed publications.
- Grey literature allows you to read research findings from beyond academia and traditional models of publishing (e.g. from industry).
- It can be more industry or sector focused, rather than academic.
- It includes reports from professional organisations, which may offer a more practical insight into particular issues or examine a topic in greater depth.
- With regards to research into health care, searching for grey literature helps to avoid "publication bias". Publication bias is the (unfortunate) fact that research projects showing the positive effects of a drug or treatment are more likely to be published in journals, compared to those showing no or negative effects. As all trials now have to be registered, searching grey literature will uncover this bias. See the clinical trials section below.

## What should I be careful of?

While there are many positives of grey literature, you do need to be vigilant.

- Always consider its source. Is it verifiable and reliable?  Do not use anything unless you are sure you can verify where it came from and who wrote it. One way of

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checking this is to look at the website's domain. e.g. official UK government documents should always be on a website ending in .gov.uk
- Grey literature typically isn't peer reviewed.  You will need to critically review it, considering any errors or inaccuracies that it may contain.
- While anything may contain some bias, grey literature may be more susceptible to containing bias. For example, a report produced by a company may be written from a certain perspective. If you think that it may contain bias, then you should explain this in your work.

# How do I find grey literature?

It very much depends on what you're looking for.  Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- ## Company and organisation websites

   If you're interested in a particular company or organisation, then it's usually best to start with their website which can normally be found via a Google search.

- ## Government reports

   Government reports are posted on government and local authority websites. The web address for these end in ".gov.something"   For example,

   - ❖ UK - https://www.gov.uk/
   - ❖ Scotland - https://www.gov.scot/
   - ❖ Full list of government addresses.

   If you are specifically interested in the UK, then these shortcuts may be useful -

   - ❖ Publications - example social care.
   - ❖ UK Government Policies
   - ❖ Consultations (open and closed) - example Network Rail.
   - ❖ Announcements - example Defence and Armed Forces.
   - ❖ UK Government Web Archive.

- ## Standards and patents

   A **standard** is a set of criteria or technical specification, which manufacturers and service providers are either required or recommended to conform to. Laws or regulations can make it compulsory to comply with a specific standard. Try

   - ❖ British Standards Online
   - ❖ ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute)

   A **patent** protects a new invention. It gives the inventor the right to stop others using, making or setting it without permission. It provides a detailed description of the invention.  Patents can be an important source of information about very recent developments that have not yet been described in journal articles or conference

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papers.  They can also provide you with an overview of recent technical developments in an area. Please see

- ❖ [esp@cenet worldwide network of patent databases](#)
- ❖ [Google Patent Search](#).

- ● **Clinical trials registers**

  Clinical trials approved by ethics committees are required to be registered with an international registry.  This includes results that were not actually published in formal publications. There are several registers to look at:

  - ❖ [WHO Primary registries](#)
  - ❖ [EUCTR](#)
  - ❖ [ISRCTN](#)
  - ❖ [US National Library of Medicine](#)
  - ❖ [Research Registry](#)

## Other useful sources

- ● [Social Care Online:](#) The UK's largest database of information and research on all aspects of social care and social work.
- ● [TRIP medical database:](#) Search engine for clinical guidelines, synopses of evidence, systematic reviews, journal articles, clinical trials, medical images and videos, patient information, etc.
- ● [King's fund publications](#)
- ● [International policy documents](#)
- ● [UNESCO documents and publications](#)
- ● [World Health Organisation (WHO)](#)

If you require any further assistance, then please [contact the Library](#).

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