
Documents – looking at other people’s work papers, pictures, presentations and displays

You do not have to make all the evidence you look at in your research for yourselves. Sometimes it will be useful to look at what other people have done – by writing ideas down, taking pictures, giving presentations or putting up displays.

You can learn a lot about schools and colleges by looking at other people’s work. For example, you can look at:

- notes from meetings
- school or college brochures
- newsletters and magazines
- timetables
- plans for teaching
- notices and posters on display boards
- talks and presentations.

Looking at other people’s work can be good. You will not get in the way or take up people’s time like you do when you are watching and listening or talking to people. Often you can look at other people’s work again and again – to check that you get things right – because the work is on paper or kept in a file. Looking at other people’s work does not have to cost anything – except your time.

But other people’s work may not tell you everything you want to know – and it may only give you one way of thinking about things. You need to remember that other people did not do their work for your research. You need to respect other people’s reasons for doing their work – and you need to think about how that work can help your research. Ask yourself: “Why am I looking at this work? What can I find out that will be useful to my project?”

There will be a lot of work that other people have done. You need to decide which bits of work will be really useful to your project – so you only look at some of the work.

You need to decide exactly what you are looking for in other people’s work. You might want to decide on some words to look out for – or you might decide to look out for bits of the work that are about a certain topic – so you look hard at the parts of the work that are most useful to you. These may not be easy things to do. It might be good to practise looking at other people’s work in these ways before you start doing this for your own research.

In some ways, looking at other people’s work is like watching and listening. You will need to ask permission to use other people’s work for your research. Some papers will be private and confidential, for example, and you will not be able to use them. Even if the work is public, you should check that people do not mind you using it for your research.