

## GLIS 637 – Scientific and Technical Information (Winter 2010)

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### Strategies for working in unfamiliar subject areas

Getting started on the job:

- 1) Take a walk through the print collection to get familiar with titles and vocabulary. Where does the subject fit in the classification scheme (LC | NLM | Dewey)?
- 2) Make use of your institution's catalogue. It often gets overlooked when we tackle complex questions. Interesting items will point to subject headings and help to match a question to a general field.
- 3) Learn the basic reference sources for the subject area (dictionaries | encyclopedias | handbooks) as well as core databases. They will serve you well when you are faced with puzzling factual questions. Subject or research guides created by your colleagues can point you in the right direction.
- 4) Ask a librarian – if there isn't an s/t information professional in your workplace contact an experienced librarian in a comparable job elsewhere (don't be shy).
- 5) Observe colleagues at the info/reference desk and read through closed chat questions. When on your own be prepared to not know and ask clients open-ended questions.
- 6) Explore the web pages, client profiles and mission statements at your workplace.
- 7) Visit clients on their turf and attend lectures and seminars offered.

Dig deeper:

- 1) Use citation analysis to identify key journals, core or hot papers, and new areas of research interest. Review the table of contents of key journals in the area (try [ticTOCs Journal Tables of Contents service](#)).
- 2) Search for a guide to the literature of your specific subject area.
- 3) Search the library and information studies literature and read journals such as [Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship](#) and [Science & Technology Libraries](#).
- 4) If you are the one responsible for creating or maintaining a guide consult others that are available online (try [LibGuides](#)).

Library associations and professional organizations can help:

- 1) A few examples are:
  - [ELD](#): Engineering Libraries Division of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE)
  - [STS](#): Science and Technology Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
  - [SLA divisions](#): Special Library Association
- 2) Take advantage of formal mentoring programs, like [Sci/Tech Library Mentors](#) (produced by STS) and [ELD mentoring](#).
- 3) Visit the [Guide to Internet Resources for Science and Technology Librarians](#), compiled by the Continuing Education Committee of STS.
- 4) Attend conferences (network!). See these lists of [science and technology conferences](#) and [library related conferences](#).
- 5) Join a relevant listserv and search their archives or send your questions out (visit [CataList](#), the official catalog of LISTSERV® lists).

## General tips for increasing your comfort level in science & technology

- 1) Take a basic s/t class or one intended for non-science students (credit or audit). Free online course materials are available through [MIT OpenCourseWare](#).
- 2) Read popular science and technology publications:
  - a. Books are often catalogued with LC subheading -- Popular works  
*Examples:*
    - Physics -- Popular works
    - Technology -- Popular works
  - b. There are great magazines out there aimed at the general public.  
*Examples:*
    - [American Scientist](#)
    - [New Scientist](#)
    - [Scientific American](#)
    - [Seed](#)
    - [Wired](#)
  - c. Some academic journals have articles and online content for everyone.  
*Examples:*
    - [Nature](#)
    - [Science](#)
  - d. To get your s/t news try [EurekAlert!](#) and look for the science and technology sections of your favorite newspaper.
- 3) View/listen to broadcasts on television, radio, and Internet.  
*Examples:*
  - [NOVA on PBS](#)
  - [Naked Scientists](#) radio and podcasts
  - [WNYC - Radiolab](#)
  - CBC Radio [Quirks & Quarks](#) or [Spark](#)
  - If you use iTunes visit [iTunes U](#)
- 4) Take advantage of public lectures and outreach.  
*Examples:*
  - [Café Scientifique](#)
  - [McGill science outreach](#)
- 5) Explore general databases for topics of interest.  
*Examples:*
  - [Applied Science & Technology Full Text](#) (Wilson)
  - [General Science Full Text](#) (Wilson)
- 6) Peruse the Internet (aha!).  
*Examples:*
  - [Science.gov](#)
  - Etc...