Hello. I’m Laureen Harder-Gissing, Archivist-Librarian at the Milton Good Library at Conrad Grebel University College. I am also the liaison librarian to the Theological Studies, Mennonite Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies programs. This means that I work directly with these programs to create research guides, and to be generally available to students to help with your library research questions.

My presentation covers an overview of the library system here at the University of Waterloo, some thoughts about how to navigate your way through academic library research, search strategies you can use online, and how to capture your research along the way. So, let’s get started.

We have quite a diverse library ecosystem here at the University of Waterloo. There are two large libraries, Dana Porter for Arts and Davis Centre for science and technology. We have several subject-specific libraries for professional programs. There are also a number of smaller resource centres not listed here. And last but not least, we have the Affiliated and Federated Institutes of Waterloo libraries, which include our library, and the libraries of St. Jerome’s University and Renison University College. All of us share the same library catalogue, called OMNI, and your WatCard is your library card for all of these libraries.

Libraries at the University of Waterloo have a strong online presence. Through the library catalogue, OMNI, you have access to thousands of online books and articles. Sitting alongside the library catalogue are over 200 specialized databases, collectively containing a vast amount of information. The library catalogue will automatically search many, but not nearly all, of these 200 databases for you. So I like to say that the library catalogue is a good place to
begin your search, but don’t stop there. If you are in Theological Studies or Mennonite Studies, you will end up spending a lot of time in the American Theological Library Association (or ATLA) Religion Database. If you are in Peace and Conflict Studies, you will be touching on many other disciplines – from education to political science to engineering to fine arts – depending on your research topic. In any case, I encourage you to check your library research guide for advice. The guides are listed here. Maybe now would be a good time to pause and, if you have not done this before, open up your discipline’s research guide and take a look around. I will be referring to the guides at different points in this presentation.

Our library system is also connected to networks of other academic libraries. We are part of a consortium in Ontario called OMNI, and you may notice that the library catalogue indicates which of our books are also held in these libraries. Normally, you would be able to order books from these libraries to be delivered here, but that service is not operating now due to COVID restrictions. However, the InterLibrary loan system is still available. This service searches the world’s libraries for items that we don’t have, and, if possible, delivers an electronic copy to you.

We all do research every day. So, what’s different about academic library research? We have become used to thinking that the information world is like this picture of the wide open prairie. All the information that we need is free, and freely available at our fingertips. However, this is not actually the case, and that is where academic libraries come in.

The open Internet does not provide access to all information. Commercial interests and regulation frame what we see. The sheer volume of information can hinder us from finding what is most relevant. The internet is also not known for setting ideas in context.

So academic libraries provide some things that the open internet does not. Academic libraries are non-commercial. Academic libraries connect to legacy bodies of knowledge, and academic conversations that go back hundreds of years. Academic libraries provide access to copyrighted materials. We are interested in making academic conversations available, and in providing contexts for that knowledge. Academic libraries are not perfect systems, and there is
much of value on the open internet. But it is important to understand that there is a wealth of information available in libraries, and academic libraries in particular.

So, if academic library research is different, how do you begin, and how do you keep on track? Here are four orientation points that might be helpful to keep in mind.

Number one: research is joining a conversation. I like this quote from *The Craft of Research*:

[No] place is more filled with imagined voices than a library....[When you read a book] you silently converse with its writer—and through her with everyone else she has read....And when you report your own research, you add your voice and can hope that other voices will respond to you, so that you can in turn respond to them.”

Academic research is structured as a conversation – this is why we insist so much on citing sources. To join a conversation, it helps to understand the language of the conversation, and what is at stake in the conversation. I will come back to this point in a little while.

Number two: research requires evaluating and reflecting. You could write a paper by deciding on an unshakable point of view and then using research to find those voices in the conversation that agree with you. It might be a great paper - a great opinion piece or personal essay. But it would not be a research paper. Research involves inquiry: finding and listening to different voices, evaluating those voices, and reflecting on your own response, maybe even changing your mind. In your library research guide, on the citing and writing page, you will find a series of questions called “RADAR” to help you evaluate what you are reading.

Number three: acknowledge the mess of research. In my presentation, I am giving you some clear guidelines and strategies for library research. Though I believe these rules are valuable, and I use them in my own research, I know they are not infallible. You will get bogged down in research, you will get frustrated and lose track. That has happened to me many times, and I’m guessing if you ask your professors they may admit to the same. This does not necessarily mean you are *doing research wrong*. In fact, grappling with problems is a natural
part of learning. What we don’t want, is to get so lost in the mess that we can’t get out. This is a
time to step back, breathe, do some reevaluation, reach out to your peers, your professor or a
librarian.

And finally, number four: research starts with play. At this point, you might want to
pause the presentation and open the library catalogue home page in your browser. The URL is
there on your screen. There you will see the blank box that is the key to many academic
conversations. Don’t feel you need to start your research with an absolutely solid
understanding of your topic or point of view. Use the blank box to play around with language
and ideas. Take notes of what you discover.

So, now that we have some orientation, let’s talk strategy. I will go over four strategies
here: pearl growing, Boolean logic, facets and research capture.

Using the idea that research begins with play, let’s try some pearl growing. As you may
know, a pearl begins from a bit of grit and grows from there. In library terms, pearl growing is
about starting with one thing – an idea, a word, a book --- and expanding your research.
Suppose I am interested in the life and thought of a German theologian and activist named
Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I don’t know much about him, except that he was involved in a plot to
assassinate Hitler during the Second World War. I wonder about how he reconciled his theology
and actions, and what his legacy has been. I search the library catalogue and come up with this
book written very recently called: *Bonhoeffer: God’s Conspirator in a State of Exception*.

Now it’s time to pay attention to what the catalogue says about the book. The library
has provided some subject headings. These links track academic conversations, and could lead
me to other books on the topic. They also give me some clues for other words I might use to
search, like “political violence,” for example.

Finally, I take a look further down the page and see all kinds of additional information.
Not every book will have this much information attached, but many of the newer books will.
Here, I read that Bonhoeffer has been the subject of intense academic conversation in the post-
war period. There have been many attempts to evaluate his legacy. I notice some concepts that
I find interesting, like martyrdom, and pacifism. I make a note to try my library search again, using those words in connection with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I am on my way to finding a topic.

Now that I am working with a few terms, it is time to try some Boolean logic. George Boole, a mathematician, described this form of logic before the invention of digital computers. Today, every online search you do has been influenced to some extent by his work. In academic library research you will come across his three terms – AND, OR, NOT – again and again.

And, Or and Not are used to expand or limit your searches. As you can see in this slide, I get a limited number of results by connecting Bonhoeffer and pacifism using the Boolean term AND. I get a huge number of results searching with OR, and I get a somewhat limited set of results searching with NOT.

Many databases, including the library catalogue shown here, will prompt you in their “advanced search” forms, to use Boolean terms. Most of the time these forms default to AND, which will be the most common term you will use.

You can build searches on several terms, such as this one for Bonhoeffer AND pacifism AND martyrdom. To make sure that the database will search words as a phrase, put them in quotes, such as this search for Bonhoeffer AND quote political violence unquote.

Remember that databases are very literal. To make sure that the library catalogue is searching all forms of the word martyr (including martyrs and martyrdom), I add an asterisk to tell the database that I want all forms of this word.

You can also construct complex Boolean searches that do several jobs at once. This is often best done, I find, in the basic search box of a database. This search for Bonhoeffer AND (pacifism OR nonviolence) tells the library catalogue to search for all library records that contain the words Bonhoeffer and pacifism or nonviolence, just in case one book uses the term pacifism or nonviolence exclusively.

Now that you know what Boolean logic is, expect to see it everywhere! As I said, most databases will prompt you to use Boolean searching. Google also has a Boolean search form at google.ca [or google.com]/advanced_search.
Now, let’s turn our attention to another tool, called facet or filter searching. Facet searching is available in many databases. After you do a first search, you will often notice a series of choices that the database makes available to you. Often, these appear down the left hand side of the screen. My initial Boolean search for Bonhoeffer AND pacifism, turned up in 456 results in the library catalogue. Because I want to focus specifically on the academic conversation about this topic, I click the “peer-reviewed journals” facet. See how my results have been narrowed to 151?

Another commonly used facet is date of publication. If I want to tap into only the most recent parts of the conversation, I can limit results to those books or articles published in the last 10 years only. On the other hand, if I was particularly interested in what people were saying about Bonhoeffer in the 1960s, I might choose to highlight that decade instead.

Yes, facets are everywhere too, in most databases, and also in google’s advanced search page. I would also like to point out that google’s advanced search includes “usage rights.” This can be helpful if you are searching for photographs that you can freely use in presentations. All of the stock, open source photographs in my presentation were found by including the “usage rights” facet in my internet searches.

The final search strategy I want to highlight is research capture. I have already alluded to this by encouraging you to take notes as you go along. Many databases provide tools to help you automate some of that note taking. The screenshot on the left is from the library catalogue. In every library catalogue book record, you will have the option to cut and paste the book’s citation, send yourself an email, copy a permanent link, or send a citation to a research capture management app. The screenshot on the right, from the ATLA Religion Database, prompts you to print, email, save or export a citation to a research capture management app.

To go one step further, sign up for your free RefWorks research capture account. Using RefWorks, you can: Capture citation information for books and articles in University of Waterloo databases, Create folders to manage your research, and Create bibliographies (almost) automatically – you will have to double check just to make sure the information is correct and formatted the way you want. Visit the RefWorks research guide to find out more.
And speaking of more, you can find more information about library services, research advice, the best online resources for your discipline, and how to reach out to me or other library staff at the links on this slide.

I hope you have a great term and explore all the library has to offer.