

GREY LITERATURE: DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS INFORMATION SOCIETY

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WHAT IS GREY LITERATURE?

Grey literature is any material that has not been formally published by a commercial publisher. If you can buy it in a bookshop, it is probably not grey literature; it does not appear in books or journals.

Grey literature covers a very wide range of material, including reports, guidelines, theses, conference proceedings, technical specifications and standards, commercial and official documentation, working papers, data sets and policy documents. It can be produced by any organization, but it is most often authored by government departments, NGOs, Businesses, market intelligence consultancies, Think tanks, Political/pressure groups, patient and consumer group, research centres, professional associations, academic institutions and international organizations.

In recent years, technical and scientific literature has continued to grow, but grey literature reports now come from many different avenues. The following types of organizations issue grey literature. This list has been copied directly from Charles Augur's seminal book, *Information Sources in Grey Literature* (*page 22*):

Associations

Churches

County councils

Educational establishments

Federations

Institutes

Institutions

Laboratories

Libraries

Museums

Private publishers

Research establishments

Societies

Trade unions

Trusts

Universities

CHARACTERISTICS OF GREY LITERATURE:

- Not primarily produced for commercial publications
- Production as a means of getting a message across rather than publishing as a commercial venture (for project or otherwise)
- Difficult to acquire
- Not part of a major distribution channels
- Few, if any bibliographic controls e.g. lack of ISBN or ISSN
- Not peer reviewed
- Transient or ephemeral in nature
- Difficult to find because historically, it is not included in commercial abstracting and indexing database.

WHY SHOULD WE USE IT?

- Some material is only available as grey literature (e.g. material intended for funding bodies such as the preliminary results of research projects.)
- Excellent source of raw data (e.g. statistics)
- Rapidly produced and disseminated (only possible without the formal publication process journal articles are subject to)- conference proceedings and results of studies may appear as grey literature over a year before appearing in conventionally published journals.
- Information can be fuller and more detailed than would be possible in journal articles, as grey literature is not bound by space restrictions.
- Enables the viewpoints of individuals less likely to publish in journals to be heard- such as patients, victims etc.

- More likely to be industry or sector focused, rather than being from an academic perspective. This can give a valuable insight into working in a chosen profession.
- Reduce positive result bias- negative results are more often included in grey literature than in conventionally published literature. Looking for unpublished material is a way of counteracting positive bias.
- Can be a way of obtaining geographically discreet information e.g. local area.
- Can offer coverage of specialist interest topics not often found in mainstream titles.

IMPORTANCE OF GREY LITERATURE:

Grey literature has emerged in scope and importance in recent years due to the proliferation of critical information now readily available to organize from e-publishing ventures. Grey literature is an important source of information. It can often be produced more quickly as it has greater flexibility. It serves scholars and lay readers alike with research summaries, facts, statistics, and other data that offer a more comprehensive view of the topic interest. In future, grey literature will more important. In a world in which free trade and instantaneous communication have eliminated many of the barriers to information flow, grey literature is gaining greater importance as a source of information for much of the world's population. The following are some of the importance of grey literature publications as postulated by Soule and Ryan,(1999).

- It can provide information that is often unavailable in published open sources
- It is often available on more timely basis than conventional literature. Conference papers, for example, are available long before any follow-up, published article will appear, yet the information content of the two versions may not differ significantly.
- It can corroborate important assertions found in other sources, which is always paramount in intelligence analysis.
- It may have a concise, focused, and detailed content. This is particularly true of technical reports and unofficial government documents, whose information content will be greatly reduced in the published form.
- The literature is always free, relevant and unique.
- It is becoming a common means of information exchange, particularly as personal publishing software improves and internet access expands.

Generally, grey literature is the main source of indigenous information, therefore, it is very relevant in carrying out researches that are home based. Lecturers, researchers and students in universities rely heavily on these literature materials like these, projects, and conference

papers, in order to again first hand information on topics under study. Other benefits are that, grey literature is more likely to report studies that ceased prematurely, as well as innovative pilot projects.

FAMILY MEMBER OF GREY LITERATURE:

Bibliographies Blogs, podcasts, emails, telephone conversations Committee reports Conference papers / posters / proceedings Data sets Discussion / working papers Factsheets Gov. reports/white papers/parliamentary papers Guidelines Market reports Newsletters Policy documents, best practice documents Preprints Protocols Research reports Standards / patents / technical specifications Statistical resources and publications Technical reports Theses / Dissertations Trials Registers – e.g. Clinical Trials

IDENTIFYING THE GREY LITERATURE:

Despite the pros of grey literature, it can be challenging to find. A search for grey literature thus requires the searcher to be creative (Tyndall, 2012). It is common now to see 'grey literature searches' included in research methods sections. The difficulty is that when conducting a web search, many search engines are unable to 'access all areas' yet accessing the grey literature means identifying the part of the information iceberg that is below the surface. For example, search engines may be able to find a site on 'Primary Health Care' but may not be able to sufficiently search within that site. To resolve this, there are increasing numbers of sites being developed to promote direct access to the grey literature without relying on these surface web crawlers (Tyndall, 2012).

Grey literature can be obtained from various sources such as specific organizations, professional bodies, government, universities, libraries, discussion groups, communities of practice and individuals (Tyndall, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates one approach to accessing grey literature.

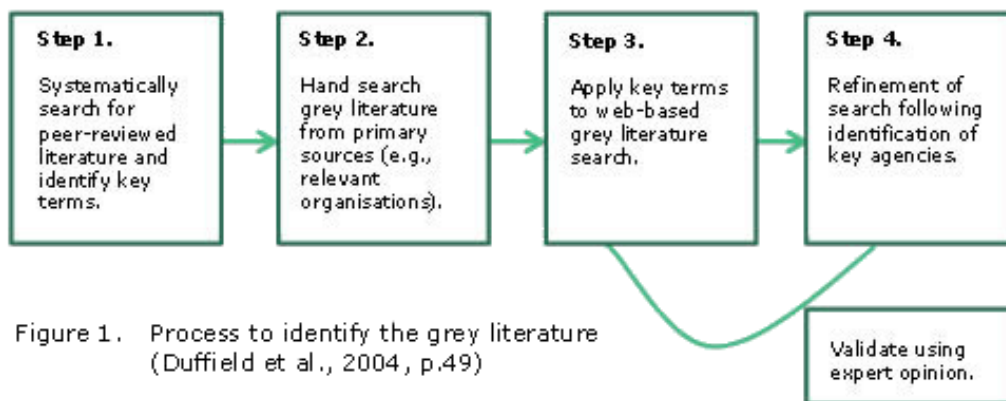


Figure 1. Process to identify the grey literature (Duffield et al., 2004, p.49)

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GREY AND PUBLISHED LITERATURE:

	Grey literature (hard to find)	Published literature (easier to find)
# of documents being published	Increasing at exponential rate	Increasing, but at a more measured pace
Speed of production	Instant, due to self-publishing on the web, speed	Slow(er), due to costs & editing process
Cost	Low (in most cases), free	High, increasing all the time
Accessibility	Free, open, immediate in most cases (some \$\$\$)	Locked, gated access, \$\$\$ (some OA)
Quality	Highly variable	Excellent, edited, peer-reviewed
Findability	Improving but 'hit and miss'	Generally stable
Archiving	Difficult due to sheer volume & formats	Also difficult due to legal restrictions, space limitations and selection
Impact on librarians	New opportunities and roles for search-savvy librarians	Problems arise due to copyright, licensing issues
Role of publishers	Some make content free to be good corporate citizens	Commercial interests based on economic models not scholarly

MANAGEMENT OF GREY LITERATURE:

The management of grey literature through cataloguing, maintenance and preservation is a core issue to be considered on library to library basis in Africa. Although, it would appear that special libraries are primarily concerned with this literature, but academic libraries will have their share, depending on their academic scope. It is imperative for libraries to catalogue and create access to this literature unlike the small libraries that may not catalogue at all but choose to file them in a pamphlet or vertical collection (Augur, 1989). Anglo American Cataloguing Rules 2 is available, which specifies how to catalogue under corporate body if possible.

In managing grey literature materials in the library, all the routine procedures in processing library materials are followed. This implies that they have to be stamped, accessioned, catalogued and classified. However, with regards to the nature of this literature, they are expected to be filed on separate shelves to enhance greater accessibility and retrieval process

ACCESSING THE GREY LITERATURE:

As knowledge transfer and exchange gains strength and visibility, there is growing awareness among researchers and policy makers that the most representative and therefore strongest evidential base must include grey literature. This Guide provides explanations around, and avenues for, accessing the grey literature with a focus on resources relevantness.

This topic guide was designed for researchers, policy makers and anyone interested in gaining access to 'hard to find' literature or non-peer-reviewed documents relevant to various fields. Due to the competitive nature of peer-reviewed publications, among other factors, only a limited amount of information will appear in academic journals. By accessing only the 'black' literature, researchers and policy makers might miss cutting edge programs presented at conferences, or key policy documents available on government websites.

This Guide provides a greater understanding of how 'grey literature' is defined, the benefits of searching the grey literature, and links to a number of useful sites providing access to grey literature relevant.

CATALOGUING:

Cataloguing and maintenance of grey literature should be considered on a library to library basis. It would appear that special libraries are primarily concerned with this literature, but academic libraries will have their share, depending upon the academic scope. Small libraries may not catalogue them at all, and choose to file grey literature in a pamphlet or vertical file collection (Augur 1989, 40). AACR2 rules are available, which specify to catalogue under the corporate body, if possible. Another option is to use the guidelines set down by Committee on Scientific and Technical Information (COSATI) for technical and scientific reports. The following elements are included in the descriptive cataloguing process for COSATI and appear verbatim from Charles P. Augur's book (p. 40):

1. Accession or report number
2. Corporate author
3. Title
4. Descriptive role - subtitle or progress report, etc.
5. Personal author
6. Date
7. Pagination
8. Contract number
9. Report number

10. Availability

11. Supplementary note

12. Security classification

EVALUATION AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF GREY LITERATURE:

Web developments have meant that grey literature is much easier to access now than it was previously. Grey literature is now readily collected in digital formats and catalogued by libraries (Lawrence, 2012; Tyndall, 2008). However, this leads to an additional challenge of determining what is useful and relevant to the researcher seeking the information.

Ideally, unpublished studies (grey literature) should be appraised to the same standard, and using the same tools as those used to evaluate published literature (black literature). The AACODS (Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, and Significance) checklist provides five criteria for judging the quality of information sources. Tyndall (2008) provides a summary of the tool which can be used when evaluating a grey literature source. Details can be found at <http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/handle/2328/3326>. Swinburne University and Victoria University in partnership with the National Library of Australia are also conducting an ARC linkage research project to develop best practice guidelines for producing and managing grey literature in Australia. For further information visit <http://greylitstrategies.info/about>

HOW DO YOU SEARCH FOR GREY LITERATURE?

Searching for GL can be an iterative process. There are numerous resources available to assist you. For example, Scopus, Google, Open Grey Repository, and Web of Science can point to different kinds of grey literature.

If you need help finding grey literature, come talk to your librarian.

CONCLUSION

Many possibilities exist, but it would be more practical for some kind of universal standard protocol to be used to ensure that bibliographic access is available for all who need it. The Internet definitely helps to provide access to some kinds of grey literature, but it is difficult to sift through all the information to find what you need. Solutions for its identification, acquisition, and cataloguing are far from solved, and will need international cooperation and consensus.

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