

DESK RESEARCH

# SECONDARY RESEARCH

The collection, synthesis, and summary of existing research.



<b>Duration</b>	Preparation: 0.5–2 hours Activity: 1–8 hours Follow-up: 0.5–2 hours
<b>Physical requirements</b>	Computer with access to research databases (internal and/or external)
<b>Energy level</b>	Low
<b>Researchers/Facilitators</b>	Minimum 1
<b>Participants</b>	n/a
<b>Expected output</b>	Text (other research), statistics

In contrast to primary research, secondary research (often also simply called “desk research”) uses only existing secondary data – information collected for other projects or purposes. Secondary data can be both qualitative and quantitative, including market research reports, trend analyses, customer data, academic research, and so on. Such secondary data can be from external sources (research published in academic papers, white papers, and reports) or from internal sources if research data has been made available within your organization. To conduct secondary research, you search for a specific topic or research question using online search engines or research platforms like Google Scholar; check out scientific databases and journals, libraries, conferences, and expert talks.

The main purpose of desk research is to check whether research regarding a topic or research question already exists and to formulate a research question more precisely and identify promising methods of data collection, visualization, and synthesis. Consider desk research as a valid starting point of a research process, simply to avoid reinventing the wheel and to stand on the shoulders of giants when you start your primary research.



## Step-by-step guide

### 1 Define research question or topic

For desk research it is important to start with a research question, or at least a field of interest for your research topic. Consider why you are doing research (exploratory vs. confirmatory research) and what you want to do with your findings (personas, journey maps, system maps, etc.).

### 2 Identify sources

Collect a list of potentially promising internal and/or external sources. If an organization does not have a knowledge management system, you need to identify internal experts who can help you to find existing research, such as someone from the market research or UX department.

### 3 Evaluate reliability of sources

Try to evaluate the reliability of each potential source – for example, a peer-reviewed academic journal is often more reliable than a newspaper. Rank your potential sources according to their reliability and plan approximately how much time you'll spend in your search on each source.

### 4 Conduct screening search

Keep track of your references during your search. Allocate a dedicated time slot for your initial screening search (e.g., one hour). If you find interesting information and/or other promising sources or links, park them somewhere and explore them later.

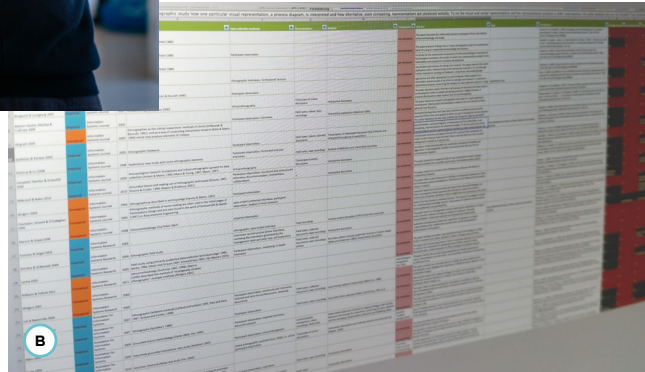
### 5 Dig deeper

Go through the list you created during your screening search and explore potentially interesting information in more detail. Read articles or dig into statistics you've found. Also, have a look at the sources used in the articles. Maybe you can even cross-reference between different data and find underlying research.

### 6 Summarize

Create a summary of your desk research. This can be more formal (a report) or more visual (a mind map).





## Method notes

- Block a certain amount of time (e.g., 2 hours) for the first three steps of your secondary research (define research question or topic, identify sources, evaluate reliability of sources). This often helps limit the temptation to digress too much.
- Secondary research also helps to identify experts within a specific domain who might be interesting interview partners, participants for co-creative workshops, or peer reviewers. ◀

- A A quick online search helps to estimate if it is worth investing additional time into a more structured review of existing research.
- B A structured review of academic papers regarding a certain topic often includes screening many papers and searching for patterns and cross-references between them. Even though this takes time, it helps.