A Level Geography

Study Focus 3

Getting the most out of research

Although you may go on fieldwork trips during your A Level Geography course to explore a range of different issues, research is something else entirely and should not be confused with it.

So where can you start?

The Internet is a fabulous starting point, but not all your research should be carried out at home while you lounge on the sofa with your laptop. It’s important that your Internet research is relevant, makes good use of time and is free from distraction. So shut down Facebook, avoid tweeting and knuckle down to some genuine geography research. The following sites could be a useful starting place, though there will be others your teacher can suggest.

**Maps.google.co.uk**

Google has produced a fantastic geographical resource over the last few years with Google Earth and Google Maps. Starting with a view of the UK, you can easily zoom into your chosen place of study and explore maps of the area.

- At the top right-hand corner of the map, click on the satellite button to see images of the area from space.
- You can also choose to overlay the satellite image with GIS features such as current traffic flows, weather reports and photographs.
- The Streetview tool on the left lets you see what it’s like on the ground.
- Use ‘Print Screen’ on your computer to get an image for your coursework or project.

**Geography.org.uk**

Wherever you want to take a look at, there’ll probably be a photo of it on this website, which now has over 3 million images. And, conveniently for us geographers, they are all handily arranged so you can search for them using a map or grid reference!

- **Police.uk**

Trying to get an idea of what a place is like without actually going there can be difficult, but the Internet can help you piece a picture together. This website gives you crime figures for a specific area and details of the types of crime and where they took place. There is a delay of a couple of months in getting statistics online, but once there you can also see how successful local police are at catching the criminals.
Zoopla.co.uk

Use this site to explore what house prices are like in any area of the country. You will be able to see the houses currently for sale, whether property prices have increased or decreased, and compare house prices on different roads. You could start by searching for your own postcode!

Looking at tourism or getting the feel of a place

A quick Internet search will reveal a host of different sites for you to explore. Each one can give you vital evidence of what a place is like. For example, if your studies call for you to focus on Grasmere in Cumbria, you may want to visit these sites:

- www.grasmere.com
- www.visitcumbria.com/amb/grasmere.htm
- www.grasmerehotel.com

Newspapers

Buying a daily broadsheet newspaper will provide you with a wealth of information. But you may also want to go back in time through the archives. This can be done at your local library, but the most effective way can be to search back issues on particular newspapers’ websites. Magazines such as The Economist also have a fine online library and may be able to help.

Topic-specific websites

There are also lots of specialist sites that could be of assistance to very specific geography studies. For example:

- if you’re looking at flooding, check out the Environment Agency Flood Watch site at environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/31618.aspx
- if rebranding is more your thing, go along to urbansplash.co.uk
- if you want to find out about local redevelopment, search for the names of local development companies or projects.

Don’t do it all at home!

However tempting it may be to carry out all your research on the Internet, why not take a trip down to your local library as well? The local history department of the library will have a wealth of resources to help you. This could include looking in old newspapers to find evidence of floods, past property prices or entertainment facilities in decades gone by to see how things have changed. There may also be a collection of Goad Plans, which give current and historic retail information for shopping areas across the UK and Ireland, and will help you to compare shopping provision as far back as the 1960s.

Enjoy your research – you’ll make some useful and surprising discoveries!