

## Description of My Research Process

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My research for “The Origins of Modern International Chemical Weapons Law” began somewhat differently from how it has for most of my papers. Normally, I start by looking for papers on my topic by searching in relevant databases like JSTOR, but this time around, I found the row of bookshelves on international law and browsed through all the material on arms control for around an hour to find some good introductory material on chemical weapons law. What I found was the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s *The Control of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, from 1971. After reading an article summarizing the legal issues at the time, I was intrigued enough to base much of the rest of my research on the Nixon period and why it was a crucial turning point in chemical weapons law.

After this, I decided to search the databases for some more specific information. Normally, when working on political science essays, I limit my searches to databases that will return social science articles. However, since I was writing on a subject that has some natural science components, I thought it would be useful to broaden my search to include the work of chemists. The article by J. K. Miettinen from 1974 in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* ended up being a valuable source for my paper, and I think justified the interdisciplinary approach. Otherwise, for the journal articles I used, my main criterion was whether the articles explained the legal issues thoroughly, since the paper was for an international law class and I was more interested in the legal aspects than the political or security aspects. Therefore, I chose not to use some of the collected papers of the State Department and the United Nations that I had previously found in the library, since those appeared to be more suitable for a paper on political rather than legal history.

The final stage of the research process involved putting the material I had found into a historical context. This was where I ran into the most difficulty, since I had chosen a somewhat narrow topic and time frame and it was hard to find more than cursory treatment of it. I had the most success looking at large surveys in the library, one of which I found in the reference section. For more recent history, I also found some news articles in the databases that allowed me to bring my narrative up to date. Finally, I found one source not through the library, but through Google, which was a page on the State Department's website providing a history of the Geneva Protocol. Normally I have less luck when searching on the web than when searching through the library's databases, but this source provided a more in-depth look at my topic than most others that I had found, and so I decided to use it.

When I looked at my completed bibliography, I definitely found it to be more eclectic than usual. (In the spirit of experimentation, I considered formatting it in Chicago rather than MLA, which I normally prefer, but I ultimately decided to go with what I knew best.) While I used books, periodicals, and websites from a number of disciplines, I believe that a varied approach allowed me to write a more interesting paper than I would have otherwise. The main lesson that I learned for conducting future research was not to be afraid of using all the resources at my disposal. In the modern world, we have access both to print books and journals and to the various resources available on the Internet, and it strikes me that to neglect one in favor of the other is to leave on the table potential useful sources. However, if one looks for sources in multiple places, one may end up writing a paper that is different from what one originally intended, and perhaps more intellectually stimulating as well.