Searching for Reference Sources

1. Goal

The goal of library research for the Ling. 103 term project is limited: you want a basic description of the sounds of your target language, ideally with many example words. An explanation of the writing system (letter-to-sound correspondence) is also helpful. Typically this material is only about 5-25 pages in print. Material of this sort exists for many languages; in fact, it is usually one of the first things that gets done when a language is first studied and described.

You do not want: history of the language, in-depth analysis of the phonology, studies of the syntax, discussion of the society in which the language is spoken, etc., etc. You also do not want multiple parallel sources. Usually, just one good one suffices to get your paper going. In fact, most of the information you are going to get you will come from your speaker, not your reference source; and people have been known to do good projects with no reference source at all.

2. Who will see your reference source?

I will. I am asking you to Xerox up to ten pages (the ten most relevant) of your source and hand it in with your paper.

3. The “Must-Have-Peer-Reviewed” policy

As an experiment, I am requiring students this year to include at least one reference source that has passed scholarly peer review.\textsuperscript{1} I will expect your Xeroxed source material to be peer-reviewed material, not Wikipedia or similar non-peer-reviewed Web sources.

My two reasons are: (a) to encourage you to make a distinction between peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources; (b) to get you to learn the (now endangered) skill of library research.

If you get totally stuck, and I find I can’t help you, I will probably authorize you to use a non-peer-reviewed source.

\textsuperscript{1} Peer review means that the material is inspected and approved by other scholars before it appears. You may assume that published books and journal articles (including those downloaded from the web sites of printed journals) have passed peer review.
4. When to start

“Soon” would be a good idea. Sadly, the basic descriptive material on many commonly studied languages has been lost from the UCLA libraries. You may have to go with Interlibrary Loan, which takes time. Also, sometimes material has to be recalled from another user, and it takes time for this material to come back to the circulation desk.

5. Where to Search

Try first: http://catalog.library.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?PAGE=rbSearch&DB=local, picking Hayes B P under Instructor. This has fairly good quality, pre-selected items, though not for all all languages.

Beyond that, I recommend you go to the UCLA online library catalog, at http://catalog.library.ucla.edu. Suppose, for instance, you were doing a 103 term project on Hausa (Chadic, Nigeria). You could find suitable material as follows:

Get on the Internet and go to the catalog. In the window labeled in: select Subject List, then type strings like these in the search window:

- Hausa language
- Hausa language grammar
- Hausa language phonology
- Hausa language textbooks
- Hausa language dictionaries

At the same time, open up a word-processing file, so you can copy and paste the best stuff that you’re finding.

If you’re getting an overwhelming amount of material, try the more specific headings. Another strategy to follow if there’s too much stuff is: go for the most recent material; it’s usually but not always of better quality.

In the Hausa search being discussed, I found that searching on “Hausa language grammar” gave some promising leads. Among them were:

Author/Name: Cowan, J. Ronayne.
Title: Spoken Hausa / J. Ronayne Cowan, Russell G. Schuh.
Published/distributed: Ithaca, N.Y. : Spoken Language Services, c1976.

Location: College Library
Call Number: PL8232 .C838s
Status: Not Checked Out

Location: YRL
Call Number: PL8232 .C838s
Status: Not Checked Out
Author/Name: Abraham, Roy Clive.
Title: The language of the Hausa people.
Published/distributed: London : University of London Press, [c1959]

Location: YRL
Call Number: PL8232 .A15l
Status: Not Checked Out

Going into the YRL, I found them both on the shelf. Naturally, I also browsed the neighboring books in the same region (PL8232).

Books in the YRL are often misshelved. If you can’t find what you were looking for, search in the nearby areas of the shelves. For instance, I found the Abraham book about two feet to the right of where it was supposed to be.

When I opened the books, I found that Abraham seemed to have too little detail. Another work I found, specifically on Hausa phonology, seemed a bit too theoretical, and didn’t have a section that just gave the basic facts, which is what I wanted.

Then I checked Cowan and Schuh, and found that I had “hit the jackpot”: very clear, good descriptions of the sounds using familiar terminology, and best of all, lots of minimal pairs (for example, pairs of words that differ only in having High vs. Low tone; or long vs. short vowels, etc.). The symbols were not all IPA, but they were close.2

My one worry about Cowan and Schuh was that there might not be enough example words. So I also checked out one of the dictionaries, and planned to consult it along with my consultant as an extra resource if the words in Cowan and Schuh turn out not to be enough.

6. California Digital Library, Interlibrary Loan, And SRLF

You can find out about books at almost any public university in California, in the Melvyl catalog of the California Digital Library, at http://melvyl.cdlib.org. Such books can be requested by interlibrary loan. For how to do this, go to http://www2.library.ucla.edu/service/2450.cfm. Interlibrary loan typically takes a couple weeks.

Many UCLA books are housed in the Southern Regional Library Facility (SRLF). They can be delivered to you in just one business day, so don’t hesitate to request these; you click on Request an item from the menu bar at the top of the UCLA Catalog screen.

2 Michael or I can help you translate non-IPA symbols; see also Phonetic Symbol Guide by Pullum and Ladusaw, on reserve in Powell.
7. Web access to peer-reviewed literature

A fair amount of peer-reviewed material originally published in print is appearing on line. I have found these to be excellent resources for my own research: they offer the efficiency of computer search, but they feature peer-reviewed material.

- Google Books: http://scholar.google.com
- Google Scholar: http://scholar.google.com
- JSTOR (scholarly journals, scanned and downloadable): http://www.jstor.org/search/

Google books usually gives you just a snippet of what you want, but once you know what’s there, you can get the real book from a library.

8. Accessing the library from home?

The UCLA library system pays real money for scholarly web resources that you can’t get as an ordinary web-browsing person. If you’re not using Bruin On Line web services, you won’t get all the scholarly goodies that your fees are paying for, unless you first visit: http://www.bol.ucla.edu/services/proxy/. By using a “proxy server”, as this page describes, you can get all of the UCLA-funded web material.