5 TIPS

Searching a Database
To find the information you need.
1 Select the Correct Database

- Locate the list of databases on the library website.
- Use the down arrow in the “All Subject” or the down arrow in the “All Database Types” to focus your selection.
- Another place to look is in the UNL LibGuides. These subject guides have links to database that are relevant to your classes and research areas.

What does it cover?
Read the database description and note the subject content and the types of documents available in the data.

Identify the following:
- What subjects does the database cover?
- What publications are indexed in the database and date range does it cover?
- What types of materials or documents does it contain? - journal full text, citations, abstracts, conference proceedings, reports etc.
Learning the Language

Examine the database 'Help Menu' to find out what special features the database has.

- Controlled Language: find search terms in the database thesaurus, descriptors and subject lists.
- Boolean Searching: use this to combine your search terms- ‘and’ combines terms and narrows a search, ‘not’ excludes a term and narrows a search; ‘or’ combines and broadens a search.
- Truncation and Wildcards: use these for spelling variations, plurals and different endings e.g. '?', '#', '*', '%', '!'.
- Stop Words- these are words that are ignored by the database e.g. ‘the’, ‘but’, ‘and’.
- Proximity Searching: near and within operators that improve relevance. e.g. n/5
- Phrase Searching: enclose words in “double quotes”, ‘single quotes’ or ( parenthesis ) to search for the phrase.
3 Construct a Search Statement

1. Identify the main concepts in your research question.
2. Select the words (keywords and subject terms) that explain the concepts accurately.
3. Use the database thesaurus, keyword list or subject heading list to find synonyms and alternate phrases and spellings.
4. Use Boolean search operators to combine your keywords and concepts.
5. If using phrases, put your phrases in “quotations” or (parenthesis).
6. Use Parenthesis to control the search, and organize the keywords and phrases.
7. Create ‘concept phrases’ of 1-4 words.
Refine or Expand Your Search

Does the search statement accurately describe your topic?

- Use Modifiers and Limiters- restrict your search to a particular search field.
- Use Boolean Search strategies to include or exclude some terms.
- Use Parenthesis to control your search.
- Use nesting to group synonyms or terms together.
- Use the Database thesaurus, subject list or keyword list to use specific search terms.
Examine your results. Locate one relevant article and use the following techniques to find other relevant articles.

1. Some databases provide a Citation Reference Search: This option if available will search for articles that have cited your original relevant article.
2. Search the database for some of the citations listed in the most relevant article.
3. Search the database or do a Journal Title Search for some of the journals recorded in the citations of the bibliography of one of the relevant articles.
4. Examine the subject descriptors assigned to the article and use these to refine your search.
5. ‘Related Articles’ if this option is available.
Conduct the Search - Examine the Results

Conduct the search - analyze the results - refine the search - then re-search!

Expand or broaden your search
1. Limit your search to specific fields.
2. Narrow/Limit your search - full-text, publication type, date, etc.
3. Broaden your search by using a broader search term.

Snowballing: use the database tools
1. 'Related Articles' - This option if available will find other articles that are similar to other relevant articles that you have already found.
2. Examine the subject descriptors in the record. Select the descriptors to view the other records that have been assigned the same descriptors.
3. 'Search within results' - if available allows you to further narrow your search.
4. Use a citation database 'Web of Science' or 'Scopus' and analyze your results.
Further Reading
Chery Meredith Lowry Ed. .
Ohio State University Libraries. 2016
Free Online @ https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/choosingsources/

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