Searching A Database
- to find the information you need

FIVE QUICK TIPS

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln
What is a Database?

1. Select The Correct Database
2. Learn The Language
3. Construct A Search Statement
4. Refine Or Expand Your Search
5. Conduct And Examine Your Search.

Contact
What Is A Database?

They have a subject emphasis.

**General Interest Databases**

- Multidisciplinary - include materials from many different subjects and disciplines- e.g. Academic Search Premier; JSTOR.

**Specialized Databases**

- Discipline Specific- More focused than General Interest Databases and includes material from related subjects e.g. Agricola- Agriculture Related Subjects; Anthropological; Literature-also includes materials from archeology, art history, economics, psychology and religious studies.

- Subject Specific - More in-depth and includes materials from one subject. e.g. Biological Abstracts.

They contain different types of documents and files.

- Journal Databases e.g. PsycArticles.
- Reference Databases e.g. Credo Reference- General Reference Books.
- Video databases- American History in Video.
- Image databases e.g. ARTStor.
- Statistical databases - ProQuest Statistical Insights- Statistics in the News.

They provide different levels of access to the documents.

**Full-Text Databases.**
Contains the full-text of the publication for viewing and downloading e.g. Psychology-A Sage Fulltext Collection.

**Bibliographic Databases.**
Contains just the bibliographic record of the document, with an abstract. The full text of the article itself is not available in the database. At UNLSelect "WEBRIDGE" to locate the full-text of the item. e.g. MLA International Bibliography.

**Citation Databases.**
Contains the article's cited reference lists, and allows you to find articles that have cited that particular author or work. e.g. Web of Science.

**Hybrid Databases.**
Contains full text to some journals and bibliographic detail and abstract of others.

*Take a look in the database 'Help Menu' to learn details about the database coverage and levels of access.*
Select The Correct Database

Which Database?
Find the database that covers your subject. Examine the scope of the database to determine if it contains the topics and document types that you need.

Go to UNL Libraries E-Resources Page.

- For a specific subject look in the "Databases by Subject" section
- For specific types of documents look in the "Databases by type" section.
- 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?
Examine the database before you begin to search. Try to find out what it subjects it covers and what types of documents you have access to.

Read the Database descriptions and Search the individual Database Menus- by looking for links to 'Publications', 'Coverage' or 'Browse Journals'.

Identify the following:

- What subjects does the database cover?
- What publications are indexed in the database and what date ranges does it cover?
- What types of materials or documents does it contain? - Journal full text, citations, abstracts, conference proceedings, reports, etc.

Each database covers different subjects and contains different types of documents. If you are not sure what database to use begin with a Multidisciplinary database like Academic Search Premier (EBSCO).
Examine the database 'Help Menu' to find out what special features the database has. What 'language' the database uses. This will help you formulate a search that will bring accurate results, and documents that are relevant to your needs, find the indexes, the thesauri and the subject lists if available.

**Controlled Language**

Thesaurus, Descriptors and Subject Lists

Check to see if your database has a thesaurus or a list of subject terms that are used in the database.

**Keyword Search**

Descriptive words that are found in the title, subject heading, abstract or text of a record.

Subject Search: These are very specific words that are used by the database to describe the 'subject' of the item.

**Boolean Searching**

Use these (Boolean or Logical) operators to combine search terms (keywords and subject terms).

**Narrow Searches**

AND- combines terms so that each of the documents found contains ALL of the search terms.

NOT- excludes the search terms so that each of the documents found contains NONE of the search terms.

**Broaden Searches**

OR- combines the terms so that each of the documents found contains AT LEAST ONE of the search terms.

**Truncation and Wildcards**

These increase the number of results. These are used for variations in spelling, plurals, and different endings.

Wildcard- substitutes the symbol for one or more letters and is usually represented by a question mark ' ? ', pound sign ' # ', asterix ' * ', percentage ' % ' or exclamation sign '!' 

Use the wildcard "?" to replace the unknown character/s

Wom?n - will find women and woman.

Truncation- search for spelling variations.
Usually represented by an asterix ' * ' or an exclamation mark '!'

Use the truncation to enter the 'root' of the word replacing the ending with ' * '

Educat* - will find education, educates and educators.

Stop Words

These are commonly used words - pronouns, articles and prepositions, (and, but, the, been, however, so). These words are ignored even when used in phrases. Look in the database to find the list of stop words. The database will replace the stop words with any other single word.

*For Example:*

University of Nebraska- will find University of Nebraska, University at Nebraska and University in Nebraska.

Proximity Searching - improve relevance

Used with Keyword or Boolean searching, to find words that are in close proximity to each other. It limits the amount of words that are between your search terms.

- Near Operators- finds words that are within the defined proximity of each other, regardless of the order in which they were entered.
- Within Operators- finds words that are within the defined proximity of each other in the order in which they were entered.

*How you perform proximity searching is different in every database. Search your database "Help Screen' to find out to enter your search statement.*

Phrase Searching

When enclosed in double quotations " " the whole phrase is searched. In some databases { } is used, in others phrase searching is automatic if the words are separated by spaces, and for some databases there may be a separate box for phrase searching.

*Note:*

- The database ignores the stop words.
- The words are searched in the order that they appear in the search phrase.
You can now write a Search Statement for your first exploratory search

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.
Does the search statement accurately describe your topic? If not Refine or Expand Your Search. Find out what tools the specific database has to help you narrow and broaden your search.

**Use Modifiers and Limiters**

Restrict your search to a particular search field. Use these to narrow your search to specific criteria.

Some Common Limiters/Modifiers: Full Text; Publication; Peer Reviewed; Date of Publication; Number of Pages.

If your search terms are found in title or subject descriptor the item retrieved will be more relevant.

**Use Boolean Search Strategies to include or exclude some terms**

Remember: AND and NOT have priority over OR

**Use Parenthesis () to control your search.**

Parenthesis’ helps you control the search strategy.

Terms within the parenthesis are executed first.

If you do not use parenthesis, terms with AND and NOT are executed first.

**Use Nesting to group synonyms together.**

When you use more than one connector, you need to use parenthesis to keep the groups together. (Universit* or college*) and (freshman or underclassman)

**Nest Parenthesis to have more control in the search.**

The database processes the expressions from left to right, and then innermost expressions first, then the next expression, until the query is completed.

**Use the database thesaurus or keyword List.(If available)**

Use the database thesaurus to find synonyms, alternate spellings and related words.

- To Expand - use all possible synonyms, variations and alternate words.
- To Narrow- use a more specific variation or alternate word.
Conduct And Examine Your Search.

After conducting an initial search examine, evaluate and use the results to adjust your search and find more relevant documents. Conducting an advanced search allows out to get more accurate, relevant results.

- Use the database advanced search options to:
  - Limit your search to specific fields.
  - Narrow or limit your search to full-text, by publication, by date, etc.
  - Broaden your search term.

Snowballing: use the database tools.

Examine your results. After you have found a relevant item. Use the following techniques to find other relevant items.

**Snowballing**

- 'Related Articles': This option if available will find other articles that are similar to other relevant articles that you have already found.
- Examine the subject descriptors in the record: click the descriptors to view the other records that have been assigned the same descriptors.
- 'Search within Results': if available allows you to further narrow your search.

Examine Citations, References and the Bibliography of relevant articles.

- Some databases provide a 'Citation Reference Search: This option if available will search for articles that have cited your original relevant article.
- Search the database for some of the citations listed in the most relevant article.
- Search the database or do a Journal Title Search, for some of the journals recorded in the bibliography of one of the relevant articles.

Use Database Tools and Aids

*Examine the database to see how to manage your searches for further use and refinement.*
- Saving Searches- Save searches for later use and adjustments.
- Create Folders- organize your searches according to subject or assignment.
- Set RSS Feeds or Alerts- Allows the database to alert you when documents that match your search are added to the database.
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