Keys to Finding What You Need in Research Databases

PRELIMINARY STEPS

1. What question are you trying to answer? State your topic in your own words. While natural language searches work well in OneSearch, another approach often is needed in individual subject databases: to identify keywords that represent the two or three most important concepts within your topic. Often these keywords will be substantive nouns rather than more generalized words like causes, effects, influences, etc.

   Sample topic question: What if any effect does smoking in movies have on teenagers and their decisions about whether or not to smoke?

2. Think of synonyms, variations, or short common phrases for your keywords, and draft an initial search statement using standard connectors (also called logical or Boolean operators), especially AND to require that all concepts be found and OR to find alternative, related terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Concept</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>smoking OR cigarettes</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>movies OR films</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tip: Use a wildcard operator (*) to retrieve variations of a distinctive word stem. Most databases will retrieve simple singular/plural forms of a word, but using an asterisk finds additional variations, e.g., teen* finds not only teen or teens but also teenager, teenaged, etc.

BEGIN YOUR SEARCH

3. On the library homepage (https://www.uhcl.edu/library) choose Databases, or choose Research Guides and then a relevant subject (Art, Business, etc.). Choose a database with coverage for your subject area and for the type of publication(s) you seek. Most research databases include journal articles, but some specialize in books, conference papers, dissertations, or other kinds of publications. Find information about a database in the adjacent description, or consult a research librarian.

4. In your chosen database, look for a search screen that offers multiple text entry boxes. This usually will be the default, but if not, look for wording like Guided Search or Advanced Search, and enter your search statement.

Most databases offer a variety of limiters to narrow the focus of results. To find scholarly articles more quickly, add a limiter for peer-reviewed journals. Adding a limiter for references (a bibliography or works cited list) sometimes helps, also.
5. Critically examine relevant records for possible ways to improve your search.

6. Are you finding too many irrelevant records? Narrow your search with one or more of these suggestions:

- Using the connector **AND**, add additional, relevant keywords or subject terms to your search statement. If you need more text entry boxes, look for a plus sign (+) or link that lets you **add a row**, or use parentheses to “nest” your search terms: (smoking OR cigarettes) **AND** prevent*
- Use drop-down lists to restrict some or all of your keywords to specific fields (subject terms, title, etc.)
- Add relevant limiters (date range, publication type, peer-reviewed journals, etc.). Databases that specialize in a particular subject area such as America: History and Life, Business Source Complete, or PsycINFO usually have additional limiters that are relevant to that discipline. Take the time to explore search options.
- Consider using the connector **NOT** to remove specified keywords or terms from your results, or consider using proximity operators (**NEAR**, **WN**, etc.), which produce narrower results than **AND**. For more information on these options, see onscreen help, or consult a research librarian.

7. Are you finding too few records? Check first for typographical errors, and then broaden your search with one or more of these suggestions:

- Using the connector **OR**, add additional synonyms, alternative keywords, or official subject terms for one or more of your concepts. Some databases have a Thesaurus or Subject feature to help you identify appropriate terms and an **explode** feature that searches a subject term and all of its narrower terms at once.
- Truncate or stem search terms with wildcard operators. In addition to the commonly used asterisk, many databases offer additional wildcards.
- If available, search for all or some of your search terms in **full text**, **all text**, or **document text** fields.
- Simplify your search by removing less critical terms or concepts.
- Remove completely or expand the range of selected limiters.
- Try your search in a different database or in OneSearch.

8. If you aren’t finding what you need, we can help. Consult a research librarian:

- Call 281-283-3910
- Text 281-816-4341
- See more options and FAQ at [Ask a Librarian](#)