

How to Search Research Databases for Academic Writing

Use these strategies and tips to make your searches as productive as possible. Don't forget to save the resources in a folder so you can access it easily later!

Create a Search Strategy




1. Summarize your topic
2. Identify main concepts (keywords)
3. Identify synonyms, alternate words and/or related words
4. Try different combinations of keywords

Refine Your Results

1. Make sure you're searching in the best database for your needs
2. The left-hand side of the search results will bring up some limiters, like source types and publication dates.
3. Advanced Search allows you to combine and/or eliminate parameters further

Use Boolean Operators

Boolean operators help to narrow or broaden your search. The most useful are AND, OR, NOT which help to connect keywords or concepts.

Boolean Operator	Examples	Retrieves
AND ...finds records containing both terms. This <i>narrows</i> the search.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Picasso AND Mona Lisa• Alcohol AND anxiety	 Retrieves results containing all of the search terms.
OR ...finds records containing either one or both terms. This <i>broadens</i> the search. It can also be used to account for variant spellings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Behavior OR Behaviour• Global warming OR greenhouse effect	 Retrieves results containing either one or both terms.
NOT ...finds records containing the first term, but <i>not</i> the second term. This <i>narrows</i> the search.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fisheries NOT Alaska• Textile industry NOT cotton	 Excludes results containing the second term.

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