Tuesday’s Tidbits

A Tip for Doing Research—Use the Library!

Do you use Google to find information when doing research? If so, there’s a better place to do it—your online library. Google searching may seem easier, but in the end you most likely won’t have the quality information you need; you’ll also have a very large number of items to review and evaluate using the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) Test or similar tool. So, while it may seem more time consuming to use the library’s resources, once you learn how to do so, you’ll be able to do a search that is much more focused than a Google search. This saves you the time needed to review and evaluate the items found; it will be a much smaller number and the quality of the information found will be much better too.

Using the library’s databases and other resources may seem overwhelming, but knowing the keys to effective research - using the right database, using the correct search terms and Boolean operators, and limiting your search results - will help you get started on the right track. With a little practice and patience, you’ll see how much better a database search is.

The library links in CAMS and Sakai provide access to scholarly, peer-reviewed, and evidence-based information from trustworthy sources including, but not limited to, these databases: CINAHL (Comprehensive Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature), Medline, PubMed, OVID, Nursing Reference Center, and Academic Search Premier.

Database links and step-by-step instructions for searching each of these databases can be found on the eJournal Databases tab. The eJournal Database Search Help tab has information about choosing search terms, creating search strategies, and evaluating sources. The location of these tabs on the library page is shown below, and some information about searching can be found on the following pages.

—Beth Smith, Librarian
Choosing a Database

The database you select should be determined by your topic and what type of article you need. If you aren’t sure which database to use, the descriptions below may help. You can ask the librarian for a recommendation too.

- **CINAHL** is a comprehensive nursing and allied health research database. It’s the place to go for research articles; it allows limiting to peer-reviewed, full-text, English-language and/or nursing journal articles and evidence based research among others.

- **OVID** provides access to a Nursing & Quality Core Journal Collection which allows you to search for full text articles in a small collection of nursing journals and the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

- **Medline Complete** provides access to scholarly, peer-reviewed journals in the areas of nursing, medicine, the health care system, pre-clinical sciences, and more.

- **PubMed** is a database of biomedical literature from MEDLINE, life science journals, and online books. It provides access to scholarly, peer-reviewed, and/or research articles in these fields. It also allows limiting your search to full-text articles as well as by publication year.

- **Nursing Reference Center (NRC)** provides access to evidence-based research for quick reference information at point-of-care, as well as continuing education modules, best practices, and more.

- **Academic Search Premier** is the database to search for general, non-nursing articles and information for classes like English and Psychology. It contains scholarly and mass-market journals, newspapers, and more.

Keep in mind that when you use the library’s databases and resources, you won’t have to spend time evaluating the credibility of the retrieved information like you do when using Google, and much more of it will be available for free.

Selecting Search Terms

Library databases are not usually as flexible as search engines like Google, so choosing search terms can be a bit trickier. To identify your key terms, start by identifying the primary nouns that capture what your topic is about or answer your research question, and then identify synonyms and similar terms to your original keywords. As you search, click on the titles of articles that seem particularly relevant. Along with a summary or abstract, you’ll see recommended subject terms and author-supplied keywords; add these to your search to find similar articles. Other tools that can help are:

- **MeSH (Medical Subject Heading)**
  MeSH terms were developed by the National Library of Medicine to standardize subject headings when searching MEDLINE. MeSH has been adopted by other databases as the indexing terms to be used when searching. You’ll find more information on MeSH terms at [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html) or by clicking on the eJournal Database Search Help tab and then selecting Search Terms from the drop down menu.

- **PICOT**
  PICOT is an acronym you can use to formulate a clinical question to guide your search for evidence. Using a PICOT chart like the one shown here will provide you with search terms, but be sure to check them in MeSH so you’re using the correct ones. Using a combination of the terms will help you refine your search and provide search term options.

For more information on using the PICOT method, please go to the **Evidence-Based Practice Resources tab** and click on the **PICOT Searching link** from the drop down menu (or to [https://hondros.libguides.com/home/PICOTSearching](https://hondros.libguides.com/home/PICOTSearching)). You’ll find a lot of information and videos on PICO searching in different databases. For additional help, please contact your librarian.
Limiting Your Search

Each database has its own set of limiters or filters. Using them is easy; all you need to do is click on a box or a word or two and your search will be narrowed considerably. The more you limit or filter, the fewer and more specific the articles found will become. Google doesn’t allow much limiting; library databases like CINAHL and Medline do. Below are some of limiters that the Ebsco databases provide; other databases provide limiters too, so be sure to look for them.

- If you need recent literature, limit your search to the most recent years or by publication date.
- Despite the fact that many search platforms’ articles cost money, you will be able to find free ones if you use the library’s resources. To do so, limit your results by selecting free articles or free full-text if this limit is available.
- If you need peer-reviewed or evidence-based information, check to see if there is a limit or filter for this. Some of the databases available through the library will allow you to do so.
- If you’d like to see an abstract as well as the full text, select Abstracts. Having an abstract allows you to quickly determine if a specific article will fit your needs.

Make sure you take the time to look at the search screen and select limiters or filters that are important for your assignment. They will reduce the number of items found and get you to the best information quickly.

Phrase Searching, Truncation, and Wildcards

Using search options such as phrase searching, truncation, and wildcards if they are available in the database you are searching will help refine your search too.

- **Phrase Searching “_______”**
  Putting a phrase in quotation marks will find the words in the specific phrase order. For example, searching for “prosthetic joint infection” will find this exact phrase and not articles that contain only one or two words in the phrase.

- **Truncation: (* or $)**
  If placed after the word diet* (or diet$), your search will retrieve articles in which the words diet, diets, dieted, and dieting are found. Check the database to see which truncation symbol is used.

- **Wildcard (?)**
  If used in a word to replace a letter, a wildcard will find words with variations of the letter that has been replaced. The term analy?e will find analyze and analyse. Check the database to see which wildcard symbol is used.

Boolean Operators

Using the Boolean operators OR and AND will help when searching. You should use OR to combine words that mean the same thing and AND to add a different concept or combine two different concepts. If you use them as explained here to connect your terms, you should find what you are looking for more quickly. Use NOT to remove a specific concept or term, but use it carefully.

Bottom Line...

Searching isn’t an exact science and can be frustrating at times, but don’t give up! Google may seem faster and easier, but using the library databases, correct search terms, limiters, and Boolean operators will provide information that is much more relevant to your topic and comes from much better sources. With the right resources, your searching will be faster, easier, and more productive; this should lead to more successful searching and to better grades as well.

If you need help, please ask the librarian!