Preliminary Research Techniques

PO311F: Food Insecurity in Africa

Let's start with an example research question taken (and modified a bit) from your assignment instructions:

How have African countries used urban farming to adapt to climate change and increase food security?

The question is broad, but we don't know what countries to focus on yet, so we'll leave it as "African countries."

First, break up the question into its main concepts.

The reason to do this is that if we type a question directly into Omni it will return few, or no, results.

Research databases work best when you link concepts together. This lets you build comprehensive, more complex searches.

The main concepts we can take from this question are:

1. Urban farming
2. Africa
3. Food security
4. Climate change

Let's start with a broad search on Urban farming and Africa to see how much research is available.

We'll use "Africa" as our geographic search term throughout these examples. This is only for the purpose of demonstration.

You should probably narrow your search to a single region, or to a specific African country or countries.

Your instructions state "you will run into problems if you try to generalize about 'Africa' as a whole as there will be far too many intervening variables."

On the Library home page, click **Advanced search**.

On the next screen, type **urban farming** into the first search box, and **Africa** in the second, then click Search.

This search finds **2,265 results**.

Note, this is **ALL** results, including articles, books, book chapters, reports, videos, and more, coming from ALL libraries in the Omni system.

Let's narrow the results to peer-reviewed articles.

Check the **Peer-reviewed Journals** box and the **Articles** box in the left-hand filters section.

Then click **APPLY FILTERS** at the bottom to finish.

We now have **1,568 peer-reviewed articles**.

That's a lot, probably too many to work with.

Since we have so many results, let's add in the 3rd concept: **Food security.**

At the top of the page, do the following:

1. Click + Add a new row
2. Enter **Food security**
3. Click **Search** when finished

This search finds 579 results.

Filtering to peer-reviewed articles as previously done leaves **405** results.

Preliminary search takeaway 1:

This general topic has lots of peer-reviewed articles and is probably good to refine for research.

Preliminary search takeaway 2:

Scanning the list of titles reveals different **geographic areas** and **countries** to narrow your research.

Examples include areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Equatorial Africa, and countries such as Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and many more.

Preliminary search takeaway 3:

Scanning the list of titles and the information underneath also may show related search terms we can add to make our search more comprehensive.

An example is **urban agriculture.**

In this section we've seen how to **run a preliminary search** on a topic to see if it's a promising area for research.

We've also learned how to apply basic filters for **peer-reviewed articles**.

We've seen how you can scan titles for promising **geographic regions or cities** to help narrow your research topic, in addition to possible **additional terms** to use.

In the next section, we'll learn how to **expand and refine** a search strategy to retrieve more relevant results.

Please move to the next section, Expanding your search.