

CREATING A SEARCH STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

When searching for regular information, we're used to just typing something into a standard search tool and getting quick results without thinking about it much.

When searching for scholarly information for your assignments though, the process is more complex and takes more time and effort. It helps a lot if you have a plan before you start.

A search strategy involves thinking about 3 things: what you need to search for, where you will search, and how you will search for it.

WHAT TO SEARCH FOR

First you need a topic. It's important to be clear and focused, as it is easier to find sources on a more concrete and specific topic than a general one.

Try to make your topic as specific as possible. For example, instead of difficulties finding a job, try difficulties finding a job for new university graduates.

If you aren't sure how to be more specific, do a quick search on your topic first in Omni. Then, look through the results to see what already exists on the topic and get ideas about what smaller aspect of the topic you could choose.

Next, think about what types of information you need to find. This varies by topic. You may need scholarly articles, books, chapters, data or statistics, business information, or a primary source to analyze.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Now you know what topic and type of information you are searching for. Next you'll need to decide where to search.

If you need scholarly articles and books, the Omni library catalogue is a good starting point for many topics. Just type your search in the search box in the middle of the main Library web page.

More specialized search tools are better for finding scholarly sources in some topics. These tools cover a specific subject area in more depth than Omni.

Find the best search tools for your topic by using the Library's subject guides. Subject guides are in the Research menu at the top of any Library web page.

Choose the guide in the subject area closest to your topic. Most guides will present the key search tools for that subject on the main page. In some guides, look for a Journals & Databases link in the Contents area in the left menu.

If you need statistics, news articles, or other types of sources, click on the Resources menu and choose More Research Materials to see specialized search tools.

HOW TO SEARCH

Once you know where to search, think for a bit about what search words you will use. This helps make your search results better.

To come up with search words, break your topic into its main concepts. For the difficulty of finding jobs for recent university graduates, main concepts are: difficulty, jobs, and university graduates.

Different words can be used for the same concept. For example:

- difficulty or problems or barriers
- finding jobs or job search or employment

Use your concepts and alternate words in your search. In most Library search tools, put different concepts on different lines. Put alternate words for the same concept on the same line separated by OR.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.