

SEARCHING SYSTEMATICALLY

In a literature review, you need to make sure you've found all the relevant sources. That means you'll need to approach your searching in a more deliberate and systematic way than usual. This video will give you some tips on where and how to search for sources for your literature review.

It's important to think about where to search. You'll most likely need to search using multiple search tools, since different tools contain different sources. For example, I did a search for social cognition in the Omni library catalogue and got a lot of results. Then I did the same search in Psychology @ Proquest and got similar numbers of results, but they are quite different with little overlap. If I only searched one I wouldn't get a good overview of the scholarly literature in this area.

The Library has created Subject Guides that point to recommended search tools for each discipline. You can find these under the Research menu in the top navigation bar on any Library web page. Each guide lists the key search tools in the discipline. They also list the librarian responsible for that subject, who is there to help you in your search process.

Once you know where to search, you'll need to come up with a search strategy. Your keywords or search words are critical to the success of your searches. If for example your topic relates to climate change, think about different ways people may refer to that concept. There are many variations, including weather patterns and global warming.

Some topics have terminology that has changed over time, or is different in different places. For example, if you're looking for sources related to Indigenous topics, you need to be aware that scholars may have used terms like Aboriginal, Native or First Nations.

When you're searching, make sure you use all the variations in terms you can think of to avoid missing important research. Do different searches, experiment, and find out what works best. Make sure you look carefully at your results to see if you find other terms that people have used, and modify your searches to include those terms too.

You'll need to do multiple searches, but you can minimize that by combining your keywords. The most efficient way to do this is to enter synonyms such as youth or teens on the same line, separated by an OR. Put different concepts, such as youth and dating, on different lines, separated by an AND. If you have more concepts, you can add more rows.

When you're searching for words that need to go together as a phrase, like social workers, it helps to put those words in quotation marks. This tells the database to search those words as a phrase instead of looking for each word separately.

Another tip is to use truncation to capture variations in spelling. Type the root of the word before the variations happen, and then put an asterisk. If I type Canad*, I'll get results with both Canada and Canadians.

Keeping track of what and how you've searched is very helpful. Searching is not a linear process, and you'll be going back multiple times to redo things. It really helps if you keep track of what worked and didn't work last time.

How do you know when you can stop searching for more? First, make sure you've tried different keywords and strategies and different search tools, and checked the bibliographies of sources you find. When you keep seeing repeat results, you can be relatively confident that you've found what there is to find.

If you're getting far too many results to work with, or only a few results, you might need to modify your searches. Ask your librarian for help.

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