Tips and Tricks for Searching Electronic Resources

This handout is designed to teach you some time saving tips and tricks for searching electronic resources.

Know Where to Search for Information

The Library vs. Google (or similar search engines)

A lot of library resources can be accessed through the internet, but that does not always mean you can get to them from Google. Here are a few differences for you to think about.

- *Library resources are expensive*: information is a commodity, and the library pays a lot so that you can have access to high quality information.
- *Library resources are focused*: there are different databases to use for different research topics. This helps you find what you need faster.
- *Library resources give you more search power*: with library resources, you can limit your search by date, research type, age group, peer reviewed, etc. You cannot do nearly that much with Google.

Books vs. Journal Articles

Articles are not always the best resource for any information need. In fact, many times, books are preferable. Here is a short summary of the difference.

Books

- cover more general information (this is a great place to start if you know little about your topic)
- contain widely accepted or known information/practices
- tend to be less current than articles

Journal Articles

- usually very specific in nature
- more current since they are published in a short amount of time

Know How to Search for Information

Keyword Searching vs. Subject Searching –There are two types of searching, keyword and subject searching. Keyword searching is what most people are familiar with. Subject searching can take more time, but tends to yield better results. Not all concepts have subject headings, and sometimes, you will want to use both strategies.

Tips for Keyword Searching

- *Use synonyms* – Keyword searching will only try to find articles with the exact word that you put in the search box. There may be other ways to describe what you want. For example, instead of searching for high blood pressure, try high blood pressure or hypertension or hbp or etc.
- *Truncate* – This can be a powerful search strategy. In a lot of databases, the symbol is "*." For example, diagnos* will bring up articles with diagnosis, diagnosing, diagnostic, diagnostics, etc.
- *Spelling* – A lot of health sciences literature is published in Europe. Try using British spelling alternatives. For instance, pediatrics or paediatrics. For more British

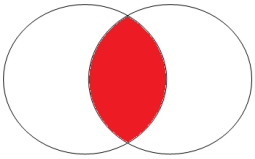
spellings, you may want to look at this site http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/jones/differences.htm

- *Use fields* – Many databases allow you to search in different fields. One way to limit results to more relevant items is to look for keywords in the abstract or title of an article.

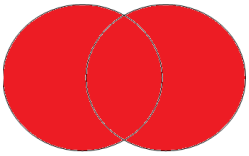
Tips for Subject Searching

- Look for the option in the resource you are searching. For example, MeSH in PubMed or "Suggest Subject Terms" in CINAHL.
- Break your search down into concepts and search each concept separately so you can take advantage of term mapping.
- If the term does not map the first time, try a synonymous term. You might also try searching for your term in the title of articles and then take a look at the subject terms (a.k.a. headings) assigned.

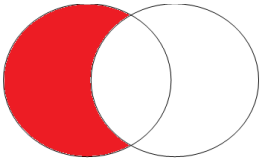
Boolean Logic - Boolean logic searching consists of individual terms or phrases connected with AND, OR and NOT. These allow a search to broaden or narrow depending on the term used.



Using AND will retrieve fewer results (ex. heart attacks AND aspirin)



OR will retrieve more results (ex. heart attack OR myocardial infarction)



NOT will exclude unwanted terms (ex. substance abuse NOT cigarettes).

Nesting – Similar to a math problem, you can use nesting to run a complex search in most databases. For instance, suppose you want to find articles that discuss the use of antibiotics to treat MRSA, and you want to try and do a comprehensive search by using synonymous terms. You could run a search that looks like the following...

(MRSA OR Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) AND (antibiotic* OR Clindamycin OR Daptomycin OR Doxycycline OR Linezolid OR Minocycline OR Tetracycline OR Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole OR Vancomycin)

Keep in mind that you have access to professional librarians who are happy to assist you with searching for information. You can reach us by phone, email, chat or in person. For more information, see www.lib.uiowa.edu/hardin