

How to Search in Databases

explore, discover, study...



- *Explore* basic database search techniques and *Discover* sources
 - Databases require different techniques from **Google**

The following guide will help you discover all the useful techniques for an effective **Database** searching so to be able to retrieve references on a specific subject for an essay, project, assignment or your dissertation.

Choose... a Database

The ILC is subscribed to a variety of **electronic resources**, including bibliographic and full text databases, e-journal collections, digital libraries, etc. that cover all subjects taught at the College. Find a database that covers your subject area (*business, computer science, psychology, etc.*) and search for references on your specific topic.

Analyse... your Search Query

Before you start to search at any database, you must try to **express your search query** in such terms that the system will understand. Follow the steps below:

Step 1 : Write the search query as a statement

This means that you should write down the search query in a sentence including only the **main terms** you wish to search for.

Step 2 : Specify all the different ways in which a term can be described

This means that you should use **keywords**, thinking of all the possible **synonyms** and variant **spellings**, in order to include all relevant references when searching at a database.

Step 3 : Identify all the possible ways to limit the search results

Most databases allow you to limit your search results by specific fields such as, **date** (*to retrieve items published on or after a certain year*), **language** (*to retrieve items published in English*), **publication type** (*to retrieve items from journal articles, newspapers, magazines, etc*), etc.

Step 4 : Use the correct search language

All databases have a specific search language that you must be familiar with to make effective searches. **Help** is usually available on the online help screens.

Example: "Higher education in Britain". There are different ways of expressing these terms:

| Main Terms (Keywords) | Alternative Terms (Keywords) | Alternative Forms (Spellings) |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Higher education | Universities Colleges Tertiary education | HE After school education Higher institutions |
| Britain | United Kingdom England UK | Great Britain U.K. |

Note: *Alternative spellings can be significantly different, for example, centre – center, organizations – organisations, colour - color.*

Use... Search Techniques

When searching in databases, there are certain techniques that make search queries effective and ensure that all the relevant records will be retrieved. These techniques include:

Search Technique 1: Combining terms with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT)

Use **AND** in a search to:

- narrow your search results
- tell the database that **ALL** search terms must be present in the results

Example 1: higher education **AND** Britain

This will automatically restrict the search results to references containing both of the above terms.

Example 2: "college students" **AND** "test anxiety"

This way, the phrases show up in the results as you expect them to be.

Use **OR** in a search to:

- combine alternative forms or similar concepts (synonyms)
- broaden your search results, telling the database that **ANY** of your search terms can be present in the results

Example: higher education **OR** universities **OR** colleges

This will add to the search results bibliographic references which include either of the two new terms.

Use **NOT** in a search to:

- Exclude words from your search
- Narrow your search results, telling the database that your first search term should be present in the results **BUT NOT** the second one.

Example: higher education **NOT** colleges

This will exclude from the search results all records that contain the term "colleges".

Search Technique II: Truncation/Wildcard searching (*, !, ?, or #)

Truncation: a technique that broadens your search to include various word endings. To use truncation, enter the **root of a word** and put the truncation symbol at the end. The database will return results that include any ending of that root word.

Examples: child* = child, children, childhood

genetic* = genetic, genetics, genetically

sun* = sunshine, sunny, sunlight

Wildcards: a technique that substitutes a symbol for **one letter of a word**. It is also useful if a word is spelled in different ways, but still has the same meaning.

Examples: m*n - retrieves men, man

wom?n - retrieves woman, women

col*r—retrieves color, colour

Note: *To find out which character is used as the truncation/wildcard symbol in a particular database, check its online help system.*

Search Technique III: Phrase searching

This technique can increase the relevance of results. Most databases allow you to specify that **adjacent terms** (*words next to each other*) should be searched as phrases. Using parentheses or quotes around search terms is a common way to do phrase searching, but not all databases or search engines use them, so you must check the online help menu.

Examples: "agricultural development"

"research methods"

Note: *It is often very easy to do phrase searching from the **Advanced** search option.*

Search Technique IV: Field searching

In most cases you will want to search for references on a specific subject, so **keyword searching** is sufficient. To make your search more specific you may select a particular field to search into. Common fields include: *author, title, journal title, abstract, publisher, date/year of publication, subject/descriptor, etc.*

Examples : TI (higher education and Britain)

This will restrict the search to the **Title** field and the search results will include records in which both terms appear in the TITLE.

JR (educational leadership) **and SU** (higher education **and** Britain)

This will restrict the search to the specific **Journal Title** and limit the search to the **Subject** field of the records. The database will retrieve all records that include both search terms found in the specific JOURNAL TITLE.

Records... Display and Mark

There are specific Menus or in some cases Function keys for these processes. To see details for each database check the on-screen instructions, or the online help system.

Use the **MARK** option to limit the number of records you wish to view in full text or to print.

Search Results... Download and Print

To download or print the full text format of the records you have selected, you must check on-screen instructions or the online help system.

Note: *You must always follow the instructions you are given if you want to avoid causing printing problems.*

Full text... not available?

If the resource contains only the abstract of an article **use the Interlibrary Request Service** to obtain a copy of the full-text.

For further help you may reach the Library Services Desk by email at: library@city.academic.gr or anagnostopoulou@city.academic.gr, by phone: +30 2310 538560/961 or in person at the Information & Learning Commons (ILC), 6th floor, Leontos Sofou building.