



LIBRARY RESEARCH

Using Databases in the Worcester State University Library

(508)
929-8027



CIRCULATION: (508) 929–8524

INTERLIBRARY LOAN: (508) 929–8523

ACCESS SERVICES: (508)929–8801

If you are using the Web to search for research - worthy material, it's easy to get confused between search engines and online/full text databases offered at a library's website.

Databases exist on the Web as *discrete* collections – they are not searchable using a Web search engine. Library research databases are generally better for finding:

- *Articles* from well-known *magazines, journals and newspapers*, especially if you need to cover a topic over a period of many years.
- Research in *primary* sources. Although some research journals are appearing on the Internet, the vast majority will still be in paper or in databases.
- *Specially packaged* or commercial information products such as *Academic One File, ERIC, Lexis-Nexis or Psych Info*.

Semester Hours

Mon to Thurs:

8am–11:00pm

Friday: 8am–5pm

Saturday: 9am–5pm

Sunday: 1pm–9pm

www.worcester.edu/library

Betsey Brenneman, Electronic Resources Librarian

E-mail: library@worcester.edu

Why Use Library Databases?

- Library Databases index electronic versions of articles from traditional **kinds of sources that your instructors expect you to use**.
- Databases contain highly specialized information, and are usually restricted to use only by members of the campus community. Most scholarly information is **not** freely available on the Internet. The Library purchases access so that **you** can have the right to use this material, even from home, for **free**.
- Most databases also allow you to put *limits* on your search. For example, you can choose to *limit* your results to only full text, and/or **peer-reviewed** articles so you can focus on material available just in scholarly journals. You can also view your search history and then combine searches for more precise results.
- Or, you can search using suggested subject *descriptors* that will limit your results to the *concept* you are searching rather than just random keywords that might return false references from unrelated subjects.
- Results lists often separate out references found in *Newspapers* or *Magazines*. This can be useful if you need information on a topic that is so current that not many scholarly studies have yet been published. Also, these sources can be useful for evaluating current awareness of your topic in the general population. These types of limits and ability to combine searches can only be found in library databases.



Types of Databases

Basically there are three types of databases.



- **Citation only** databases list and describe the written material but do not contain the text of those works. So, to find the books described in the Library's online catalog you have to find the book on the Library's bookshelves. To read an article found using a citation-only database, you have to find the journal issue that has the article.
- **Full-text databases** include the entire text of written works. A full-text database may contain magazine or journal articles, company financial data, e-books, or articles from a subject encyclopedia such as the *Encyclopedia of Science & Technology*.
- **Combination databases** contain bibliographic records for some items, and both the record and the full-text of other items. Reality check: ✓ not everything in library databases is full text. Many publishers do not allow the full-text articles from their print journals to be reproduced online because it limits their ability to sell subscriptions.

Selecting a Database



There are many types of materials stored in library databases and there are hundreds of databases available. In fact, that selecting the best one for your research can be confusing. Searching for scholarly material is a little like being a detective. First you have to know where to look.

- There are 20 [Subject Guides](#) on the Library Website that organize library subscription databases by **broad subject categories**, as well as listing the **best** of free websites. If you can't find an appropriate database, start with the [General/Multi-disciplinary Databases](#) guide for an index which covers many disciplines such as *Academic One File*.

Data Mining in Library Databases – (Find more of what you're looking for)



Subject Terms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">*SCHOOL violence*VIDEO games*HOMICIDE*STUDENTS -- Crimes against*SCHOOL shootingsVIOLENCE in video games
Applied Keywords:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">aggressioncomputer gamesmass mediaschool violenceviolence

Databases don't work like Internet search engines. If you start searching by using keywords that describe your topic, this can often return many irrelevant results

Browse through your results list and look at 2-3 of the most relevant results. Notice the **Subject** or **Descriptor** field in those records and note the terms used. It is usually not easy to guess which subject headings are used in a given database.

- These *subject headings* or *descriptors* (also called *controlled vocabulary*) will suggest additional or more appropriate terms to bring together all related materials on the subject.
- It is helpful to consult the database's *thesaurus* (subject headings) to identify the correct subject term. Know the "language" of each database to help you locate the best matches.
- Redo your search using the subjects or descriptors you identify. Your results will be much more *precise* than those from your initial keyword search.
- Savvy searchers use these techniques to find items that focus on a specific *concept*. A subject or descriptor search may result in a smaller number of search results, but they will have a higher degree of *relevancy*.
- Note that even in the *Basic Search* screen you can set limits such as date of publication, or select only peer-reviewed. Also try practicing with the *Advanced Search* screen which features drop-down boxes to *combine* free text searching (your keywords) with subject headings or descriptors using Boolean operators such as AND, or search by author.

Getting Better Search Results in Library Databases



Searching a database is very different from using an Internet search engine. Search engines automatically put **and** between each term that you search. But the default search method for databases is called **phrase searching**; the database will only retrieve articles that have those words next to each other. So if you search for articles about the *portrayal of women in the movies*, or *global warming is destroying our environment*, here's how your results will differ:

Internet Search Engine	Library Database Search
Search: women portrayal movies will yield thousands of results because it searches - women and portrayal and movies	women portrayal movies will yield nothing because the database is looking for that exact phrase – all the words next to each other Search: women and portrayal and movies instead. This tells the database to look for those words anywhere in the article text, abstract or title.
Put quotes around words to search as a phrase "global warming" (as a 2-word phrase)	Automatically searches global warming as a 2-word phrase
global warming environment (no quotes) searches global and warming and environment	global warming environment yields no results because it is searching for a 3-word phrase Search: global warming and environment

Synonyms:

To add synonyms to your search, you need to connect them with the word **or** and use parentheses () around the terms you are using.

media violence **and** (teenagers **or** adolescents)

(doctor **or** physician) **and** assisted suicide **and** ethics



Truncation:

Another way to get more results from your search is to use the **truncation symbol** * (an asterisk). You use the truncation symbol when you want to search a root word by all of the different endings of that word. So typing **teen*** in the search box tells the index to find: **teen**, **teens**, **teenage**, **teenager** and **teenagers**.

Note: When doing searches, there is no magic number. Searching for articles is not about the least or greatest number; it's about what makes sense for a particular topic. So take the time to experiment and see what you discover!

Full-text Not Online?

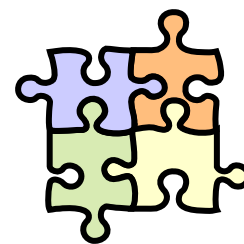
If you've searched a database and found the citation [reference] for an article which is perfect for your research project – congratulations! But what if your article is not available full text? *But don't despair – you still have options:*



- Re-evaluate other articles you found. Another may be as good, or better. *Beware, however, of selecting articles simply because the full-text is online;* this is not good research practice. In fact, some non-full text databases do a better job of covering a particular subject area, such as *Psych Info, Medline* or *Cambridge Scientific Abstracts*.
- Don't discount a database just because it doesn't have full-text articles. You can still obtain copies of articles. Click on the [Getting Started](#) link in the right menu on the Library Website for links to:
 - Check to see if the [WSU Library](#) subscribes to the journal. Every journal title (along with the years we own) is listed in the online catalog, whether in print, electronic or microfilm format
 - Check the [E-Journal Finder](#) tool to see if the journal is in one of our online databases. Sometimes a journal that is not full text in *one database* is available full text in another database
 - Check to see if the full-text is available in our collection of [e-journals](#).
 - Check to see if a [local library](#) subscribes to the journal.
 - Finally, if you have time to wait, ask for a photocopy of the article from the [Interlibrary Loan Service](#) at the Circulation Desk (average 4-10 days wait).

Final Tips

Expect to *revise* your search as you progress in the research process.
Library research is a complex and ever-changing process.



- You may need to make a trip to the library to use materials or research tools that are not accessible off-campus. Remember, you want to use the **best** information for your research, not JUST what is available online from home.
- Allow **time** for gathering materials that are not available at WSU. The [Interlibrary Loan](#) service can borrow articles and books from other libraries, but this process takes anywhere from 4 to 10 days. 95% of what we receive is obtained at no charge.
- Also allow **time** for reading, taking notes, synthesizing, revising your research strategy or conducting additional research as new questions come up.



library@worchester.edu