

How to use a database

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1. If you haven't already, turn your scientific topic into a research question. Always keep this question in mind throughout your research process.
2. Find the most important words. These are the keywords, which are essential to the meaning of the question. Usually there are 2-4 keywords.

When you're searching databases you can ignore the rest of the words. Search engines and databases don't speak in whole sentences like us, they're programmed to search for keywords.

3. Think about whether any of your keywords have synonyms and write down the synonyms for each word. There are a number of reasons for doing this:
 - To give you options to broaden or narrow your search
 - To make sure you're finding all the possible resources for your topic
 - The database or search engine might use different words to the keywords in your concepts, so you want to cover all your options
4. Use advanced search techniques on your search terms to make it clearer what you are looking for. (Particularly wild cards and searching for phrases)
5. Always select the full text option.
6. Before you start opening every article that comes up in the results, stop and look at the results page and see if the results are what you expected.
7. Adjust as you go:
 - If you notice keywords coming up in your results that are different to your search terms, try using the new keywords instead
 - If your searches aren't returning relevant results use other advanced search techniques (particularly Boolean) to broaden or narrow the search
 - Use the options on the side of the page to refine your search, eg. Date ranges, peer-reviewed etc
8. Use the abstract to decide whether you will read the full article or not.

Also pay attention to the date- make sure you don't use research that's out of date.