Welcome to Research 101: Searching is Strategic

Today we’re going to talk about searching for sources and how to think about searching in an academic context. I’m going to tell you right off that searching takes time and the best researchers are those that don’t give up!

Often when you are starting your research you don’t know everything about your topic or even where to start. Luckily, there are librarians and online resources that can help point you in the right direction. They may direct you to a specific database that holds articles that relate to a particular topic or subject area. This kind of database is nice because unlike Google it limits the bucket that you are searching down to only the articles that have been published in a particular field. There are even databases that search just newspaper articles from one paper or just black and white videos. Knowing which “bucket” to search in is important!

When starting to search you always need to think about what it is you are going to type into a database or search engine. Librarians call these keywords. They’re the concepts that describe the source you’re looking for. The hard part is that scholars often use specific terms or jargon, to describe their topics. We may not know what those words are at first but by drafting our keywords and finding synonyms you will have multiple things to try if your first search isn’t successful.

A student once said: 
*keywords are key!*

When you’re searching in a database, using different keywords will give you different results every time. We suggest writing down your searches just in case you want to come back to one particular search or want to see what you have already tried. If you get too many results you might try adding another keyword and using “AND” between the two words. This tells the database that you want to see those articles you found but only the ones that have your additional topic. If you don’t get enough results you might take out a keyword -- or check your spelling.

Databases also have a lot of tools that can help you during your search. Often there will be suggestions of terms that came up within your results. Using one of those could help you focus your research more. The articles may also suggest new subject terms which you could use as additional keywords in your searching.

This process takes time and you shouldn’t get discouraged! You will get better with practice, and there is a lot of help out there. Go see your librarian soon and ask if they have any tips or tricks to help on your research journey.

To recap:
- Choosing the appropriate database or place to search is important
- Coming up with keywords is hard but using synonyms and the words you find while researching can help