

APU Regional Center Libraries

Database Searching ~ Tips for Success

Choose the topic and identify search terms

Search terms are also referred to as key words, topics, subject headings or descriptors. The best way to begin your search is to identify exactly what information you need. Write your idea down and identify the important concepts. These concepts will be the search terms you will use to begin searching the database. A librarian can help you identify your search terms quickly and explain the difference between a "keyword" search and a "subject search."

Choose the database

APU subscribes to over 120 library databases which contain citations, abstracts, and full-text periodical articles. These databases may be general in scope and cover many subjects, or may be subject-specific. Use the subject menu at www.apu.edu/library/apuresources/onlineresources/ to help you identify the most appropriate database for your purposes. You may wish to start with a general database like *Academic Search Elite* or *ProQuest Research Library* and then move to a subject specific database. Contact a librarian if you need guidance in selecting the appropriate database.

Use database help buttons

Nearly all databases have help buttons which give simple instructions and tips on using the database.

Use the advanced search screen

Using the advanced search screen in a database offers multiple text boxes, Boolean operators, searchable fields, and various search options which allow you to create a well-focused search.

Keep a search history

Keep a search history by noting the date, system and database, search terms, and results. Many systems will keep the search history for you. A search history will help you keep track of your work and saves you time in the long run. If you email records to yourself, note the accession number of each record, in case you encounter problems receiving your mail.

Identify the best records

Select the best records for your purposes. Do you need a scholarly journal article or will a popular magazine article be appropriate? Is the article available full-text on the screen? Is it available in another APU database? If not, does APU carry the periodical in print? Can you request the article from another university through Interlibrary Loan?

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