Library Resources and Literature Searching for your Dissertation

The following worksheet is a practical step by step guide to how to begin your research. It explains ONE database, however you should be using 2-4 databases to obtain the best results. You will find a list of suitable databases on your library subject guide http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/homepage

Select your subject, and then go to the tab “Resources” for the list.

Literature searching worksheet

- A literature review is a select analysis of existing research which is relevant to your topic, showing how it relates to your investigation.

- It explains and justifies how your investigation may help answer some of the questions or gaps in this area of research.

- It’s easy to think that the best way to search for texts is to use the Internet – to ‘Google it’. There are useful online tools that you may use, like Google Scholar. However, for most literature reviews you will need to focus on academically authoritative texts like academic journals, books and research reports. Searching Google will give you thousands of hits, many of them lacking academic authority, and it can be very time-consuming sorting through your results.

- A better idea is to use the academic databases available from the Online Library Subject Guide

The best way to approach your literature search is to:

- Know your question. Be clear and concise about what it is you are looking for and what you are not looking for.

- Experiment with different keywords/concepts/alternative terms.

- Set the parameters of your search.

- Be systematic in your approach.

- Use a variety of databases.

 Information Skills - Literature searching
Step 1 – Keywords

What is your research topic / question?

Write down the keywords

These are the main concepts of your research
Step 2 – Alternative Terms

Taking your main concepts, now think of alternative terms that you could also include in your search, e.g.

- Synonyms (words/phrases that mean exactly or nearly the same)
- Acronyms (words formed from the initial letters of a name, e.g. DCLG)
- Regional differences in terminology & spelling (e.g. globalisation [UK] globalization [US])
- Old and new terminology
- Professional and lay terminology (e.g. Homeless [professional] tramp [non-professional])

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original keyword</th>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
<th>Concept 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tips**

- Use narrower terms if you want to make your research more specific: E.g. Use England instead of UK
- Use broader terms if you want to widen your research:
- Truncation: e.g. organizat* will find organization, organizations, organizational, etc.
- Spelling. Use ? in place of a letter: e.g. organi?qation = organization + organisation
Worksheet: Search Terms

Using the sheet below create your own alternative terms for each of your concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept 1</th>
<th>Concept 2</th>
<th>Concept 3</th>
<th>Concept 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Alternative Terms:
## Boolean Operators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AND</strong></td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Combines concepts. (this narrows/increases your results) delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Searches for <em>either</em> concept. (this narrows/increases your results) delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOT</strong></td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Excludes results containing this word. (this narrows/increases your results) delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*** **</td>
<td>=</td>
<td><strong>Truncation.</strong> Searches for everything which contains the same bit of a word. For example: Offend* = will find offending, offender, offenders Counsel* = will find counselling, counsellor, counsellors Remember to use it for things with both UK/US spelling: behav* = search behaviour and behavior (this narrows/increases your results) delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“ _ _ ”</strong></td>
<td>=</td>
<td><strong>Speech marks</strong> allow you to search for a <strong>phrase</strong>, when the words <strong>appear together</strong>. For example: “domestic abuse” = will find every record with those words together. domestic abuse = will find results with the words appearing paragraphs apart, or only one word appearing. (this narrows/increases your results) delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3 – Refining Your Search

Where appropriate, clarify any required limits / refinements for your search. You may wish to do this by creating a mind map of the areas you will need to consider.

For example:

**Search Terms**

- **Context!**
  - Gender
  - Gangs
  - Law

- **Time?**
  - Historical/current

- **Location –**
  - England OR UK OR Britain OR EU?

- **Not**
  - Newspapers

- **Define terms and use synonyms**
  - Juvenile
  - Delinquent
  - Hoodie
  - Gangs

- **Use * i.e.**
  - Crim* = Crime/Criminology

Enter your own terms
Step 4 – Entering your search terms

Once you have thought about all the relevant aspects of your search, the next stage is to enter them in a database search.

A list of relevant databases can be found on your library subject guide:

This worksheet will focus as Web of Science. All databases vary slightly, but the basic principles remain the same and this worksheet will provide you with transferable skills.

Try conducting the same search in a different database and compare the results.

Use OR to combine your ‘Alternative Terms’ for each ‘Concept’

Select NOT to exclude terms

Use AND to combine your different ‘Concepts’

“Add row” to add additional terms for searching
Step 5 – Refining Your Results

You will find your results will contain information that is not relevant to your search so you will need to filter. This can be conducted in a number of ways:

1. Too many results that include an area you do not wish to examine? Repeat the search but select NOT in the drop down selection. For example, NOT alcohol.

2. Your results will appear with an option to refine down the left hand side. Do use these to aid your search.

Web of Science categories to focus results to relevant field.

3. Reduce the number of results by selecting another field. For example, title search. Other databases will allow you to search the abstract. What is an abstract?

You can also change the ‘field’ box to reduce the number of results.

In this example.

Refine by date
4. If you find a potentially useful article, click on the title and look at the **Keywords** (also known as **Subject Terms**) used to describe the article. Sometimes you can find additional useful search terms to add to your list.

**It is often useful to also read the article’s abstract for the same reasons.**

5. Once you have found a useful article, it is useful to note how many times it has been cited (used in another article) to gain an understanding of the wider “academic discussion”.

![Web of Science screenshot](image-url)

**Times cited useful for finding further articles**

**Keywords to add to your list**
Step 5 – Search history and combining terms

Using the Social Science Citation Index, you may conduct further searches simply by selecting Search, you do not have to save previous searches (only if accessed in one continuous session). All searches conducted in one continuous session can be found in Search History. From there searches may be combined to limit or widen results.

Will return all searches conducted this session

Use AND to focus your search results, i.e. Reoffending AND Crime AND England
Step 6 – Evaluating your research using the CARP method

Currency
• When was the information published or posted?
• Has the information been revised or updated?
• Does your topic require current information, or will older sources work as well?

Accuracy/Authority
• Is the information supported by evidence (e.g. references, research data)?
• Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
• Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
• Are there spelling, grammar or typographical errors?
• Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
• What are the author’s credentials or organisational affiliations?
• Is the author qualified to write on the topic?
• Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address?
• Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? examples: .com .edu .gov .org .net

Relevancy
• Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
• Who is the intended audience?
• Is the information at an appropriate academic level?
• Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?
• Would you be comfortable citing this source in your research paper?

Purpose
• What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade?
• Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
• Is the information fact, opinion or propaganda?
• Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
• Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional or personal biases?
Finally …

Literature searching is a trial and error process. You may not get the results you expect straight away, but by using different combinations of search terms you will eventually begin to find relevant articles.

Be patient and systematic in your search!

Remember to keep an accurate record of your results so you can find them again when you need them!
# Quick-reference list of resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Library Loans (£3 charge)</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/interlibraryloan/interlibraryloans">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/interlibraryloan/interlibraryloans</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Resources (public page)</td>
<td><a href="https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/library">https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/library</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Resources (authenticated access)</td>
<td>Log in at <a href="https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk">https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk</a> myUniHub &gt; My Study &gt; My Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Libguide</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/psych">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/psych</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet Nursing Libguide</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/vetnursing/welcome">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/vetnursing/welcome</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Referencing Libguide</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/plagiarismreferencing">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/plagiarismreferencing</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>All MDX databases</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/az.php">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/az.php</a></td>
</tr>
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<td>RefWorks</td>
<td><a href="https://refworks.proquest.com">https://refworks.proquest.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite Them Right</td>
<td><a href="https://www.citethemrightonline.com/">https://www.citethemrightonline.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software (download SPSS and more)</td>
<td><a href="https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/it/software">https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/it/software</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Enhancement Team</td>
<td><a href="https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/writing-numeracy">https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/writing-numeracy</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Libguide (Download the checklist)</td>
<td><a href="http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/research">http://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/research</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you need help, or have any questions about Library resources, you can contact me at s.parry@mdx.ac.uk