Library Research for Geography and Environmental Studies Students

Tutorial 6: Multi-database search examples

Hello. In this video we'll take some of the techniques we learned previously and demonstrate how you might put them together to begin research on your literature review.

Let's start with an example research question: What are the impacts of fire suppression policies on forests in Ontario Provincial Parks and protected areas?

Let's assume that we don't know at this point if there have been any fire suppression policies implemented in Ontario Provincial Parks.

In that case, it's best to start more broadly and examine the research on fire suppression policies in general.

Using the techniques we discussed in the previous video, our preliminary search string for this question might look like this:

      "fire suppression"

      policy OR policies

      impact* OR effect* OR outcome?

Here we have split the question into three concepts: fire suppression, policies, and impacts.

We added in related concepts using the OR operator.

We have question marks in some words to pick up variant spellings up to only 1 character, for example outcome or outcomes.

The asterisks retrieve multiple character variants, such as impact, impacts, impacted and so on.

We've put double quotations around fire suppression because it is our main concept and an important exact phrase found in the research literature.

I'll start in the Web of Science database.

I'll add three rows, type in our terms and run the search.

Using multiple rows for each concept allows us to add in additional terms we come across in our search.

For example, by clicking an article title in our set of results, I can see the entire record.

The Abstract and Keywords fields shown here, and the Subject fields in other databases like ProQuest, can give us additional terms to add into our search.

Next, I will add a few related terms I found from other articles using the OR operator: "fire exclusion", "fire-suppressed" and "fire removal".

We see over 50 additional articles added to our results.

Changing the field drop down selection from "All fields" to the "Title" field reduces the number of results to 25.

These should be highly relevant, as noted in the previous video, because the phrases are found only in the titles of the articles.

We can filter our results in the left-hand navigation pane.

The "Articles" filter in Web of Science limits to peer-reviewed research articles.

The Review Article filter limits to scholarly review articles of topics, such as narrative, scoping, or systematic reviews.

It's important to note these are not original research articles themselves, only reviews of research.

We can take our search and re-run it in other databases.

Here is the ProQuest database, which I've opened from the Geography Subject guide.

I'll re-do the same search and run it with my filters pre-set for Peer-reviewed, Scholarly Journals, and Articles.

We're retrieving a slightly larger number of articles.

We could re-run the same search in multiple databases across multiple platforms because all the databases use the same search language.

Also, Instead of downloading all the articles each time we search, we could instead download the records to a Reference Manager like Zotero.

Once we do that, we can remove all the duplicate records, and retrieve our articles only when we need them.

We'll look at how to do that in a later tutorial.