

Search Strategy Worksheet

For Peer-reviewed Articles

This worksheet will help you develop and document a comprehensive, systematic search strategy for peer-reviewed articles.

What is Your Topic?

Write down your topic in one sentence. It can help to phrase the topic as a question.

E.g., What are the impacts of COVID on elderly residents of long-term care facilities?

Have You Identified Any Key Articles About Your Topic?

If you already have a few articles that are directly relevant to your topic, note them below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What Databases are Relevant to Your Topic?

Write down a list of the databases you intend to search. Do you know which database(s) contain your key articles? You'll want to include them in your strategy.



What Search Terms Will You Use?

Major concepts

Write down the major concepts for your topic.
E.g. elderly, long term care, COVID, quality of life

Synonyms

Write down synonyms for the major concepts to start developing a bank of search terms.
E.g. old age, aging, elder care

Subjects

Subjects come from a database thesaurus. Note that different databases use different thesauri, which impacts the subject you use.

Database: Sociological Abstracts
Thesaurus: Sociological Thesaurus

"Elderly"
Use term for: elderly

Database: Sociology @ EBSCOHost
Thesaurus: ProQuest Thesaurus

"Older People"
Use Term for elderly

Identify some subjects for your major concepts. To start, select 1 database from your list. Search the thesaurus and check subjects listed in any relevant articles you have already found.
E.g. Database #1: Sociological Abstracts – Elderly



How Will You Improve Search Results?

Database Search Tactics

Try using some of the following database search tactics to get better results.

- **Truncation** = use an asterisk* at the end of a keyword to include multiple endings.
E.g. therap*→therapy, therapies, therapist, therapists, therapeutic, therapeutically
- **Phrase searching** = use “quotation marks” to find more than one word in a row. E.g. “elder care”
- **Boolean AND** = use **AND** to combine main concepts in a search. E.g. “elder care” **AND** “COVID-19”
- **Boolean OR** = use **OR** to combine synonyms in a search.
E.g. elderly **OR** “old age” **OR** “senior”

Field Searching and Limits

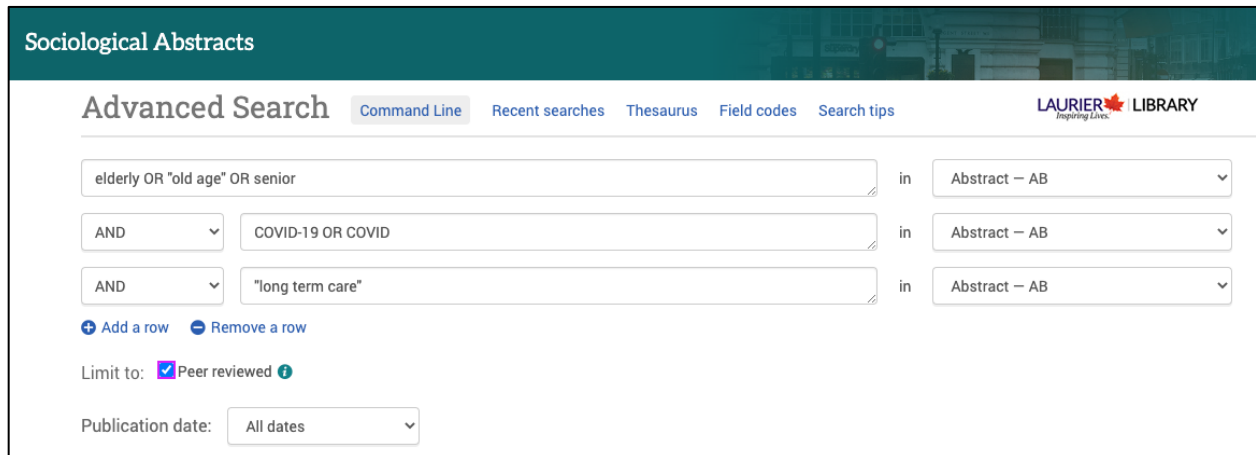
Narrow your search and make it more specific with field searching and limits.

- **Field searching** = use the drop-down beside the search box to find terms in specific areas of results. Codes beside each field tell the database where to search for a term.
E.g. **ab**("elder care")→all results will have “elder care” in their **ab**stracts
- **Peer review limit** = check off “peer reviewed” to search for published research literature.
- **Date limit** = confine your search to a specific date range.



How Will You Combine Search Terms?

Try some searches using different combinations of terms in each of the 3 relevant databases you listed above. Use search tactics, fields, and limits to improve results.



The screenshot shows the Sociological Abstracts Advanced Search interface. The search terms are: "elderly OR 'old age' OR senior" in the field "Abstract - AB", "AND COVID-19 OR COVID" in the field "Abstract - AB", and "AND 'long term care'" in the field "Abstract - AB". The search is limited to "Peer reviewed" and the publication date is set to "All dates".

Search String

Use search strings to show how you got your best results in each database. Remember that you can copy and paste search strings from the database.

E.g. Sociological Abstracts

Limit: Peer-Reviewed

Results: 10

ab(elderly or "old age" or senior) AND ab(COVID-19 or COVID) AND ab("long term care")

