

SEARCHING EFFECTIVELY

INTRODUCTION

In this video we're going to find out how to search for scholarly sources. We'll talk about coming up with a good search strategy, how to search, and how to fix searches that don't work out well.

SEARCH STRATEGY

First we'll look at coming up with a strategy for your search.

We're used to just typing something into Google and getting quick results. When searching for scholarly information, though, the process is more complex. It helps a lot if you have a plan before you start.

Your plan should include what to search for, where you will search, and how you will search for it.

First, make sure you have a clear focus for your topic. Often, it's hard to find sources on a general topic, but easier for a more specific one. For example, instead of searching for difficulties finding a job, search for difficulties finding a job for new university graduates. Think carefully about your specific topic at the beginning.

Next think about what types of information you need to find. This will really depend on the topic. Scholarly articles are common, but books are useful for broader topics and getting an overview, and are more common in some areas. You might need data and statistics, business information, or a primary source like a film or diary that you'll be analyzing.

Once you've figured out what to search for, think about where to search. For most information, your university library web site will be your best option.

At Laurier, the Omni library catalogue is a good starting point to find books and scholarly articles. You can find the Omni search box in the middle of the main library web page.

If you're looking for other things like statistics, videos, or news articles, choose More Research Materials from the Research menu in the top navigation bar.

Finally, think about how you will search. Try to pull out the main concepts in your topic. For example, if our topic is foreign nannies decision to immigrate to Canada, our concepts will be nannies, immigration, and Canada.

Think of other words people might use to talk about your concepts. I couldn't think of other words for nanny, but people might refer to immigrants rather than immigration, or Canadian instead of Canada.

SEARCH BASICS

Now that you have a plan, you can start searching.

We'll use the Laurier library catalogue, Omni, as an example. Other library search tools look a bit different, but they tend to work the same way. You can start by typing into the main search box. Let's use our main concepts, nannies and immigration and Canada.

On the results page you'll see how many results you found. You'll also see some ways to limit your results on the left. Let's look at articles. Limit to scholarly or peer-reviewed articles by clicking on the Peer-reviewed link on the left under Resource Type.

You can also use the other options in the left menu to refine your search results, like publication date.

You can see more information about each article by clicking on the record. For most articles and books, this gives you a short description of the content.

If you're registered in a Laurier credit course, you'll also be able to get to the full text of online articles and books using the links here.

That's how to do a basic search, but what do we do with the alternate words we came up with earlier? To use them, click on Advanced Search to the right of the search box.

Here we can put in all our terms. We'll start with nannies on the first line, then immigration or immigrant on the second line. It's helpful to keep different concepts on separate lines.

The AND and OR mean something quite specific in a search. We use AND to connect two concepts, to be sure both words will show up in our search results. We use OR between alternate words for the same concept, to indicate that we are ok with having either one term or the other in our results, but that we don't need both of them together.

Finally we'll put in Canada or Canadian on the third line.

Using our alternate words in the search gives us a lot more articles in our results. Using alternate words is one of the best ways to make sure you aren't missing major sources on your topic.

REVISING SEARCHES

Your initial search efforts often don't turn out exactly how you'd like, but there are strategies to improve your results.

One of the most common problems is not finding enough on your topic. When this happens, there are 3 strategies you can use.

First, think about your search words. Often you can find more results by using different words. Look through your results carefully to get ideas about other words you might be able to use. When I did this I saw that the major program for foreign nannies in Canada is called the Live-in Caregiver Program. If I revise my search to include nannies OR caregivers, I get quite a few more results.

I could also just change my search completely to live-in caregiver program and Canada. If I do this I get fewer results, but they are all pretty much exactly what I need. Often you need to try different combinations of search words before you find one that works.

Second, if different search words don't help try broadening the concepts you use in your search. For example, nannies are one example of domestic workers. If I search for foreign and domestic workers and Canada, I get a lot more results.

The third strategy is to look somewhere else. Different search tools cover different content, so will give you different results. Academic libraries have a large range of tools that cover content in different subject areas.

On the Laurier library web site, you can see these by choosing Subject guides under the Research menu. You'll see a list of different subjects, and can pick the one that matches your topic best to see search tools for that subject.

The other common problem you'll encounter in your searches is finding too many results, or finding results that aren't very relevant.

Let's do a search for legalization and prostitution. Then I'll limit to Peer-reviewed in the left column. I get a lot of results, and they are on all sorts of subtopics, from psychology to history to medicine.

To improve this search, click on Subject on the left. Subjects are words used to describe the key content of the articles. I've decided I'm most interested in the legal aspect, so I'll click to limit to Law. Now I have a lot fewer results and they are much more relevant. Often working with subjects will help improve your results.

There are two other strategies for making your results more manageable.

First, pay attention to the search words you use. As we've seen, you get better results with certain words, so try different ones, like decriminalization instead of legalization.

Next, narrow your focus. If you get too many results it may be that your topic is too broad. I could redo my search using legalization and prostitution but adding laws, an additional concept. This makes my topic more focused and my results more precise.

As you can see, searching for scholarly articles is not a simple process. It involves multiple attempts and different strategies, and taking cues from your results each time to improve your search the next time. Having a search plan and some strategies for revising your searches will help you find sources more effectively.

QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK

If you have any questions, please ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.

Let us know whether or not this video was helpful. Go to library.wlu.ca/videofeedback to give us feedback and help us improve.