

GETTING GREAT RESULTS: NARROWING YOUR SEARCH

Ever find yourself with this problem? You're starting on a research project; let's say the question "how do drugs affect your body?" You go to your favourite search engine, and type in the question, and the result is thousands, or even millions of hits.

But you don't want lots of results. You want great results that are appropriate, scholarly sources for your research project.

How do you get those results? I'll give you four suggestions on how to get what you're looking for.

SUGGESTION 1: USE A RESEARCH DATABASE TO NARROW RESULTS TO ONLY SCHOLARLY MATERIALS.

A link to our databases can be found on our library homepage at the Databases tab on the left.

I'll show you how to narrow to only scholarly sources in just a second.

Using the PsychInfo database as an example, we'll type in our question "How do drugs affect your body?"

Although we're using a research database, we're now getting too few results. If we look closely at the titles, we see they are also not very relevant to our question.

The problem here is that the database doesn't recognize the question.

SUGGESTION 2: USE SPECIFIC WORDS IN YOUR SEARCH

This leads to our second suggestion: use specific words or ideas in your search instead of questions for better results.

As an example, we'll type a specific drug, caffeine, into the search box.

We'll narrow our results to only scholarly articles by checking the peer-reviewed box below.

SUGGESTION 3: NARROW RESULTS TO PEER-REVIEWED

And that's our third recommendation -- narrow results to only "peer-reviewed" or scholarly articles.

Our previous search returned 3013 results, better than a broad search over the web, but still too many. We need to narrow down our results even further.

SUGGESTION 4: NARROW YOUR RESULTS USING “RELATED SEARCHES” OR “SUBJECT TERMS.”

If we look at the top of the screen in PsycInfo, we see it provides some “related searches” and if we click “Caffeine AND Emotional States, we narrow our results down to 142.

However, this suggestion may not be to a topic you’re interested in.

On our previous results page, at the right hand side we see an area to narrow by Subject.

Expanding the plus sign, then expanding even more brings us to a number of subject terms we could use to narrow our results.

For example, we could tell the database to include results with the specific subject term “sleep disorders” and caffeine.

Now our results have been narrowed down to 30 scholarly articles.

Once you become more familiar with your research topic, and the terminology, you can get similar results by setting up your search to look in the “Subject” field at the outset.

Most of our research databases have similar features to help you narrow.

This should ensure you get great results that are relevant, scholarly and precise.

SUMMARY

To review, we just looked at how to get great results by narrowing your search using a research database with specific words or ideas, by limiting to “peer-reviewed” articles, and by using specific subject terms.

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.