

RESEARCHING A TOPIC

It is important to have a clear sense of the topic to be investigated. It requires you to break down the topic into its separate ideas or concepts. A recommended strategy is to formulate your topic as a question. For example “What occupational risks does a coal miner face in his job?” This allows you to focus on the key concepts and push aside less relevant information. Think of synonyms that describe your concept. Decide on the type and level of information sources needed, for example, do you need background information, statistical information or guidelines. Will you need to consult original research or secondary sources?

There are many sources of relevant information. The following list provides types of information sources and their specific strengths in aiding your research topic.

- ◆ **Encyclopedias** provide background information and history on a topic.
- ◆ **Dictionaries** define words and provide synonyms.
- ◆ **Yearbooks** and **Handbooks** contain current statistical and demographic information.
- ◆ **Textbooks** are sources of detailed information providing background information or an overview on “state of the art” information.
- ◆ **Databases** and **Indexes** provide focused information on a topic. Databases also provide more current information than printed materials and offer powerful searching capabilities. Most citations have abstracts.
- ◆ **Full text databases** provide complete text to journal articles or book chapters. Full text databases are available via the Library’s Home Page at <http://library.luhs.org>

Once you have decided what type of information you need, use the appropriate tools to find that information.

- ◆ Search Loyola University Libraries’ Online Catalog, **Pegasus**, to determine if Loyola owns a book or journal title either in print or electronically. Pegasus is available through the library homepage or directly at <http://pegasus.luc.edu>
- ◆ Use Ovid or PubMed to search Medline and other databases for journal citations, many of which have links to full text journal articles.

Searching Pegasus, the library catalog

Pegasus, Loyola University Libraries’ online catalog, contains book and journal holdings of all Loyola Libraries.

The Libraries are the Health Sciences Library (located on the Medical Center campus in Maywood, IL.), Cudahy Library and Science Library (located in Chicago on North Sheridan Road), Lewis Library and the Law Library (located on Pearson Street in downtown Chicago), and the Rome Center Library (located in Rome, Italy).

You can search Pegasus by author, title, subject, call number or keyword. Most materials located in the other Loyola Libraries can be sent to the Health Sciences Library for your use.

Searching Databases

Structure of Databases

A database is an organized collection of information. Understanding the structure of a database will help you locate and retrieve information more efficiently. The main component of a database is called a unit record. Each unit record contains a number of fields. Fields include author, title and source information. All fields are searchable.

Concepts

Break your topic down to the most important concepts. For example, if your question is “Why is aspirin used to treat headaches?” the important concepts would be aspirin and headache. Enter each concept (or keyword) separately. Use Ovid’s combine feature or the Boolean operator “and” to connect your concepts.

1. *aspirin*
2. *headache*
3. *1 and 2*

Boolean Operators (AND, OR, NOT)

Boolean operators are connectors used to combine search terms to narrow or expand a search.

- ◆ Use AND to narrow a search. When you use AND, both terms must be present in any records you retrieve: *aspirin and headache*
- ◆ Use OR to expand a search. Your search will retrieve all records with either of the terms: *headache or migraine* (especially useful for grouping synonyms)
- ◆ Use NOT to exclude a term: *aspirin not Tylenol*.

A search statement can contain one or more Boolean connectors. If you are using both AND & OR in the same sentence, you must “nest” (or use parentheses) your Or’d statements. *Aspirin and (headache or migraine)*.

Subject Searching

Medline, PsychInfo, Cinahl and many other databases are indexed using a controlled vocabulary or subject headings. Medline’s controlled vocabulary is called MeSH. Subject searching is the most efficient way to search a database since it eliminates the need to search synonyms or variations in spelling. If you are searching an Ovid database, you can enter your keywords and the system will automatically “map” to the correct heading. Remember to search each keyword separately and then combine your terms.

Limiting a Search

If you are searching an Ovid database, click on the LIMIT icon and you can choose appropriate limits for your search. Common limits include language, human, evidence based medicine reviews, review articles and full text available.

If you have any questions about researching a topic, using the online catalog, or searching either a database or the Internet, contact a Research & Access Services Librarian at 6-9192.