

Lab 1: Focusing Research Questions, Using Library Databases

Primary Database for Scholarly Publications in Sociology

SocINDEX. 1895 – present (only selected core journals are indexed as far back as 1895). A major database for sociology and related disciplines; indexes articles in ~5,700 journals (most, though not all, are peer-reviewed); also provides abstracts of books, book chapters, dissertations, and conference papers. Full text is included for nearly 900 journals and 17,000 conference papers.

SocINDEX offers comprehensive coverage of sociology, encompassing all sub-disciplines and closely related areas of study. These include criminology/criminal justice, demography, ethnic & racial studies, gender studies, marriage & family, sociology of medicine & health, political sociology, religion, rural & urban sociology, social development, social psychology, social structure, social work, cultural anthropology, sociological theory, substance abuse & other addictions, and violence.

Basic Concepts for Searching Databases

Concept	Explanation	Example
Phrase search (quotes required)	search for an exact phrase (most, but not all, databases use quotation marks)	“death penalty” “standardized test” “reality TV”
Boolean logic (for keyword searching)	use Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) for more precise searching	See following examples
AND	search for records that have <i>all</i> of the words (narrows the search)	race and poverty drug use and educational attainment
OR	search for records that have <i>any</i> of the words (broadens the search)	homosexual or gay or lesbian or queer china or japan or korea
NOT	<i>exclude</i> records that have the word (narrows the search)	advertising not (TV or television)
Truncation	search for root word with any ending (most, but not all, databases use an asterisk [*])	adolescen* [finds adolescent, adolescents, adolescence]

Additional Techniques for Database Searches

Concept	Definition	Example
Complex Boolean search	[place search words for the same concept in the same search box (or in parentheses)]	(spous* or wife or wives or husband*) and (abus* or batter* or violen*)
Proximity	require words to appear within a certain distance of	asian* n4 american* african w2 american*

	each other n (for "near") = words can appear in any order w (for "within") = words must appear in specified order	(n# and w# indicate the maximum number of intervening words) note: if no quotes or proximity connectors or are used, Ebsco defaults to w5
Field qualification (field limiting)	require words to appear in a certain field in the database record (easy way is to use drop-down menus)	au coleman (for author field) ti racial profiling (for title field)
Limit (filter)	restrict search results to a subset of the database	e.g., by language, year of publication, type of publication
Add to folder (Mark, Save, Store, etc.)	select or save records from search results for future action	save specified records to display, print, email, or add to bibliographic manager (e.g., RefWorks) later

Exercise for narrowing results using a series of progressively focused searches

1. Click "New Search" (upper left corner) to start over
2. In Box 1, type: drugs and in Box 2 type: crime and click "Search"
3. Change drop-down menu for Box 1 from "Select a Field (optional)" to "SU Subject Terms" and click "Search"
4. Do the same thing for Box 2 and click "Search"
5. Refine results by choosing "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals"
6. Refine results again by choosing "Publication Date" 2007--2017
7. Under Refine Results / Limit To, click "Show More;" under Language, select English
8. Focus results by adding a new concept. In Box 3 type: teen* or youth* or adolescen* (truncate terms!)
9. Click "Search History" to review prior searches (click again to close search history)
10. Try another limiting tactic: for "crime," change drop down menu from "SU Subject Terms" to "TI Title"

Other Databases Recommended for Sociology Topics

Academic Search Complete

Indexes articles from ~13,600 academic periodicals in all disciplines; over 80% of the journals indexed are peer-reviewed; ~ 67% include full text

Depending on your topic, the following databases may also prove useful. If you need assistance using these or other library resources, ask at the Research Desk in Mudd.

Anthropology Plus	Legal Collection
Black Studies Center	LegalTrac
Communication & Mass Media Complete	LGBT Life (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender)
Criminal Justice Abstracts	MEDLINE
EconLit	PAIS International (public policy)
Education Research Complete	Peace Research Abstracts
Environment Complete	PsycINFO (psychology)
ERIC (education)	Social Sciences Citation Index
Ethnic NewsWatch (ethnic/minority/native magazines, newspapers, etc.)	SPORTDiscus (sports, fitness, athletics)
Gender Studies Database	Urban Studies Abstracts
iPoll Databank (Roper Center for Public Opinion Research)	Worldwide Political Science Abstracts

Tips for Identifying Research Studies

- Research articles generally include:
 - summary or abstract
 - statement of hypothesis, question, or assumption to be tested
 - literature review
 - methodology section with description of subjects, procedures, and tools used
 - findings/results section, with analysis of results, significance, and/or explanation of conclusions
 - suggestions for further research or discussion of what the results *don't* reveal
- Limit search results to academic, scholarly, or peer reviewed journals; although limiting provides a preliminary filter, not all articles in a scholarly journal report on evidence-based or empirical research (e.g., letters to the editor, editorials, book reviews, commentaries, etc.), so you need to evaluate each article individually.
- Look for research-related key words and phrases: study, measure, metric, subjects, cohort, data, survey, interview, focus group, control group, case study, field research, ethnography, pre-test/post-test, textual analysis, content analysis, qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, etc.
- Look for statistics, charts, and tables, as well concepts such as qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal, correlation, data, etc.

Contact information

Cynthia H. Comer
 Academic Commons Coordinator
 Oberlin College Main Library
 Office: Mudd 103
 P: 440.775.5032
 E: cynthia.comer@oberlin.edu