Lab 1: Focusing Research Questions, Using Library Databases

Primary Database for Scholarly Publications in Sociology

*SociINDEX*. 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.

*SociINDEX* 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

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

Additional Techniques for Database Searches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex Boolean search</td>
<td>[place search words for the same concept in the same search box (or in parentheses)]</td>
<td>(spous* or wife or wives or husband*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and (abus* or batter* or violen*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>require words to appear within a certain distance of</td>
<td>asian* m4 american*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>african w2 american*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field qualification (field limiting)</td>
<td>require words to appear in a certain field in the database record (easy way is to use drop-down menus)</td>
<td>au coleman (for author field) ti racial profiling (for title field)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit (filter)</td>
<td>restrict search results to a subset of the database</td>
<td>e.g., by language, year of publication, type of publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add to folder (Mark, Save, Store, etc.)</td>
<td>select or save records from search results for future action</td>
<td>save specified records to display, print, email, or add to bibliographic manager (e.g., RefWorks) later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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
Black Studies Center
Communication & Mass Media Complete
Criminal Justice Abstracts
EconLit
Education Research Complete
Environment Complete
ERIC (education)
Ethnic NewsWatch (ethnic/minority/native magazines, newspapers, etc.)
Gender Studies Database
iPoll Databank (Roper Center for Public Opinion Research)

Legal Collection
LegalTrac
LGBT Life (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender)
MEDLINE
PAIS International (public policy)
Peace Research Abstracts
PsycINFO (psychology)
Social Sciences Citation Index
SPORTDiscus (sports, fitness, athletics)
Urban Studies Abstracts
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts

Tips for Identifying Research Studies

• Research articles generally include:
  o summary or abstract
  o statement of hypothesis, question, or assumption to be tested
  o literature review
  o methodology section with description of subjects, procedures, and tools used
  o findings/results section, with analysis of results, significance, and/or explanation of conclusions
  o 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