

# Research Sources and Techniques (or, computers never get tired)

## Searching forwards as well as backwards

If you find a source that's perfect for (or even close to) your topic, try bibliography mining. This means using that source's bibliography to find more literature on your topic. This technique, also known as pearl growing (think the way grains of sand slowly accumulate into a pearl), means you start with one relevant source and work your way outward from there, finding all the references cited in that one awesome source, leading, in turn, to more sources on your topic.

## Search tips and techniques – a quick refresher

- 1) **Phrase searching** – “wicked smart” = anything with the phrase “wicked smart”
- 2) **Truncation** – this technique entails lopping off the end of a word and replacing it with a wildcard sign. Most databases use one of the following: \*      ?      \$

*Example:*      barf\* = barf, barfing, barfed, barfly  
                  wom?n = woman, women

- 3) **Boolean searches** – invented by a man with an aesthetically ugly last name, these searches allow you to find citations while often weeding out what you don't need. The two main operators are AND and OR, and they work precisely the opposite way you'd imagine.

*Example with AND:* books and history = book history, the history of books, the history of Bookman's Press, anything that has both terms in the article

*Example with OR:* digital or electronic or online = any source with the term digital, online, or electronic – using “or” casts a much wider net than “and”

- 4) **Subject headings and descriptors** – these will be your best friends in a database. They will lead to major concepts that you can search with and describe your topic.

## Databases to start with...

**Art research** → Art Abstracts, ARTstor, Communication and Mass Media Complete (for the a/v folks)

**Music research** → International Index to Music Periodicals, RILM, Historical Abstracts

**History and literary criticism** → Historical Abstracts, MLAIB, JSTOR, Project Muse

**Social Science research** → Educational Resource Information Center, PsycINFO, EconLit

**Science research** → Web of Science, PubMed, specialized databases (e.g., Chemical Abstracts)

**Web of Science** → don't let the name fool you. This database is for all disciplines. It's ideal for cited reference searches – i.e., searching forward, by using the name of a specific author, article, or book that's big in your field, and seeing who else has cited that person/work.

**Google Scholar** (<http://www.scholar.google.com>) → unlike Google, the Scholar version searches in publishers' indexes and some library databases, as well as Google Books and other sources. Use the advanced search to narrow your results by year and where your search terms appear in the page. Also good for cited reference searches; once you find the source that gets cited a lot, click the "Cited by" link beneath it.

### **Need more?**

Go to <http://www.lib.udel.edu/db/> and click on the drop-down menu "Databases by Subject."

### **Maximize your database searching**

Many database companies (EBSCO, ProQuest) will allow you to search more than one database at a time. If you're in one of these databases, look for the term "Choose Databases" or "Searching databases." These terms are usually along the very top or border of the database page.

### **Computers never get tired**

**1) TOC alerts** – most e-journals will have a feature allowing you to receive a Table of Content (TOC) alerts via email whenever a new journal in your subject area is published. I *\*highly\** recommend this practice, since it allows you to quickly browse the TOC of a journal to see if there's anything that might be relevant for your research.

**2) Automated pre-set database searches** – many databases will allow you to save your search terms and receive email alerts about new sources that fall within the parameters of your search terms. Once you execute a search in a database, look for the word "alert," to save your search term and specify how often you want to receive sources that fall under that search term.

### **Joy in repetition**

You know you're on the right track when you start seeing the same people's names show up again and again, because this means you're becoming familiar with the prominent names in a particular field or subject area. And when the articles and books you're reading begin to sound a bit repetitive, that's when you *really* know you're becoming familiar with the literature in your field.

### **Mind the gaps**

If you're reading an article or book and don't see an author's name that you think should be cited in the work, that's a clue that the source you're looking at may contain a critical gap—the author of the source you're looking at may be unaware of (or purposefully eliding) other author's works. As with the "joy in repetition" phenomena above, this is another way to help you map the critical conversation about your research topic. You can now see what a particular author's critical gaps may be, and can get a better idea of how that author's ideas fit—or don't fit—with other criticism in their field.

### **Quick refresher on getting the full text of an article**

If you find a book or article that's not available, there are three things you can do:

- click on "Get It!" and look for the green check mark
- search DELCAT, the online catalog at UD Library, to see if we have the journal in print
- put in an Interlibrary Loan Request (see below)

## **Interlibrary Loan – when you need it and the library doesn't have it**

When you've clicked on "Get It!" and can't (because the library doesn't have it), it's time to use interlibrary loan, which is library speak for "we don't have it, but we'll get it for you from somewhere else."

Here's where to start:

<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/ill/>

Once you log in, use the left-hand menu to navigate around.

Requesting articles → click on "Article Request"

Requesting books → click on "Loan Request"

## **Make an appointment with a librarian**

Sound geeky, but it'll save you sooo much time later...

<http://www2.lib.udel.edu/usered/subj.htm>

## **Need help and don't want to leave your bedroom?**

Ask a librarian: <http://www2.lib.udel.edu/ref/askalib/>