Conducting a successful literature search:
A researcher's guide to tools, terms and techniques

Finding high-quality information can be a challenge. Sometimes you need help, but you aren't able to speak directly with an expert. Reference these cards when you need quick support—think of this as a Librarian in your back pocket!

1. Keywords, Operators & Filters

2. Search Tools

3. Types of Literature

4. Evaluate Information

5. Organize Research

ELSEVIER

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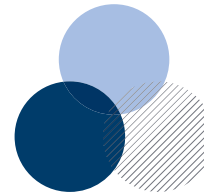# 1. Keywords, operators and filters

Brainstorm
keywords

These are the main ideas of your research question/topic sentence.

Expand
your keywords

Look at the subject headings of the materials you find and use those terms as applicable.

Or look up your keywords in a subject-specific database thesaurus to find predefined terms (called "*controlled vocabulary*").

Use
boolean operators

Insert **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT** into your search to broaden or narrow it.

For example:
PTSD **OR** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder **AND** soldiers **NOT** Navy.

Refine
your search results

Filters in the database allow you to narrow a search by year, content type, etc.

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2. Search tools

Select the best tools:

Abstract and citation database

Short descriptions (abstracts) of research content so you can quickly get up to speed on a topic and determine what content is worth exploring more.

Full-text database

When you're ready to dive deeper into research, seek out searchable, multidisciplinary databases to access the full breadth and depth of research in web/PDF formats.

Search box on library homepage

Discover your library's full catalog to view a wide array of available research. *Note: Not all databases may be included, so remember to check other databases, as well.

Institutional Repository (IR)

What other research is available to you? Check your library or website to discover the latest research produced at your institution. *Note: Format may vary from final publication output.

Library catalog

When looking for items housed physically in the library (as well as some electronic items).

Web search engine

When looking for popular and widely-available content, web searches can return a full range of sources. *Note: Not all results will pass research-level scrutiny.

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3. Types of literature

You should find:

Articles

Journal
Written by a researcher or scholar for a specific field, reviewed by peer scholars before publication

Magazine
Written by a journalist for a mass-market audience

Newspaper
Written by a journalist to inform the public about happenings in the world

Books

Monograph
A book on a specialized topic

Ebook
Any book accessible in full text online

Reference work
A collection of research, e.g., *encyclopedia*

Data

Types of available data:
- Equations
- Charts and Graphs
- Chemical Reactions
- Data Sets
- Maps /geographic data

Grey Literature

A name for other research material such as:

Conference proceeding
Panels, presentations and poster sessions at a conference

White paper
Document that often contains legislation, outlines future trends, or is a call foraction on a topic

Dissertation or thesis
Student research papers often culminating in a master's degree or PhD

Patent
Rights to an invention granted by an official government agency

Other publication
Document not published in scholarly channels, such as a government document

Published report or dataset

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4. Evaluate information

To determine trustworthiness of the material, try the **CRAAP test**
developed by the *Meriam Library* at California State University, Chico[1]

Currency

- When was the information published and is that important to know?

Relevance

- How important is the information to your needs?

Authority

- Who is the author and what are their credentials?
- Do they work for a reputable institution?
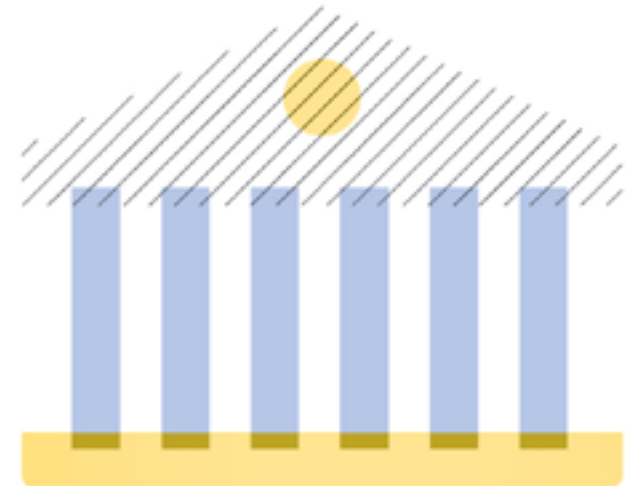- Was the information published in a peer-reviewed journal?

Accuracy

- How reliable is the information?
- Does it lack citations?
- Are there spelling errors?

Purpose

- Is it a well-balanced independent piece of research, or intended to sell a product or idea?

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http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval_websites.pdf

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5. Organize research

Save materials such as article **PDFs** into a document
library and/or download the citation information

Citation Manager / Reference Manager / Document Library

An online tool or desktop software used to organize and
store citations and full-text articles or other documents,
create bibliographies, insert in-text citations into a paper,
and share references with research partners.

Citation

The act of explaining the source of the information
found during the course of your research. Citation is
a mandatory scholarly practice that gives credit and
helps prevent plagiarism Citations may be used in
bibliographies, footnotes and within the body of your
text. Common citation formats are **APA, MLA** and
Chicago style.

Example:

Crystal Renfro, The Use of Visual Tools in the Academic
Research Process: A Literature Review, *The Journal of
Academic Librarianship*, Volume 43, Issue 2, March 2017,
Pages 95-99, ISSN 0099-1333,
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.02.004
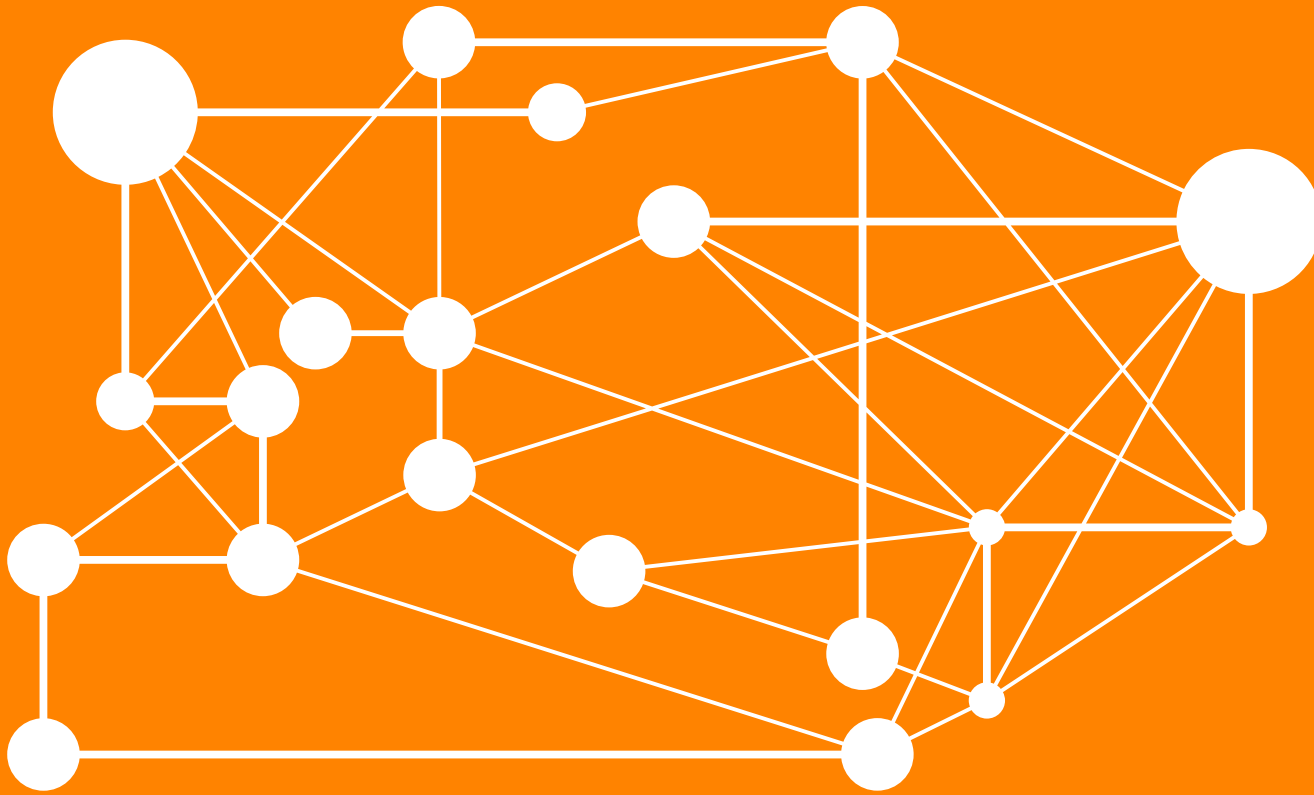
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