

TOP TEN TIPS FOR TACKLING TRICKY DATABASE QUERIES

1. **Know your database name.** Are you talking about a specific database or a database provider? For example, EBSCOHost (or just plain EBSCO) is a collection of databases, not just one. Be aware of which individual database you are using. EBSCO is the provider- the "brand" - not the information source. You are searching Academic Search Premier, not EBSCO!
2. **Use the navigation the database provides.** As difficult as it may be, break the habit of using your browser's back and forward buttons. Look for options the database provides to move from screen to screen; failing to do so may result in loss of search results and information. The back button is your last resort!
3. **Make sure you are in the right place.** Regardless of how good your search terms may be, if you are searching the wrong database you will not have good results. Make sure the database is appropriate for the topic at hand. Don't be afraid to try another database.
4. **Look for similar features.** If you are aware these exist in databases you will begin to look for them. They will permit you to more easily transfer your skills from one database to another. These features include:
 - o Multiple search boxes for your keywords and phrases
 - o Multiple search fields (usually in a drop-down menu)
 - o Features that allow you to limit your search
 - o Options to use Boolean operators in your search
 - o Features that allow you to save, print, or e-mail your results
5. **Use the help provided.** Use help options provided by the database provider, these are tools that can be of great assistance during those 3 a.m. research sessions.
6. **Know how to narrow and broaden a search.**
 - o Too much information? Look at some of the citations that appear to be on target. Examine the subject terms associated with these and repeat the search using these alone or in various combinations.
 - o Too little information? Think in broader terms. Can a topic be viewed as part of a hierarchy? If so, move up one step. Are you using appropriate terminology? Authors in various professions may use varying language to describe the same thing.
7. **Don't get too fancy.** Truncation and nesting may be a charm for (some) librarians, but their use is not consistent across databases.
8. **Use the limit options provided.** Is it necessary to search all dates available? Do the results need to be only scholarly sources? Are you looking for a particular kind of resource? A specific language? Check out limit options to make your search more focused.
9. **Get the correct information to find the print source.** Gathering citation information to locate an item can sometimes be more confusing than expected.
 - o Appropriate source information includes: source name, volume, issue, date, and page numbers.
 - o Watch for tendencies to copy accession and database numbers that will not lead to actual information retrieval.
10. **Look for Discover links which will provide access to articles via other electronic resources.** There is overlap in database coverage to which the University Library subscribes. Even if full-text is unavailable in the database you are currently searching, the **Discover** link may provide full-text through another provider.