UTS: LIBRARY

Best Practice for Literature Searching

Being Systematic and Comprehensive

Session Outline

1. **Introduction Presentation/Workshop** (10:30 am – 11:00am)
   a. Know what you want – what is your research topic/question? Small group discussions plus Pre-session activities. Ask students to split up into groups of two. Instructions next page. (no more than 15 minutes)
   
   b. What resources are available? what you should expect to find in each place and how to decide which is the best database? There are more than just journal databases too.
   https://prezi.com/2aypypwqaeg8/ecr-connect-researching-for-the-win/

2. **Guest presenter: Athena Hammond** (11:00am – 11:15 am)

3. **Workshops in Discipline Groups** (11:20am – 12:30 pm)
   a. We will split into three groups and this is when you will have the opportunity to try searching for your topic using the search strategy you will develop this morning. The aim is that you’ll be in groups relating (roughly) to your subject discipline and with librarians who are experienced with your subject areas. You might use the activities in this booklet to help you develop your search strategy.
   
   b. Besides practicing your researching skills while Library staff are on hand, you need to find at least one Research Article to bring to the next session with Dr Terry Royce.
Develop your search strategy : Workshop

Activity 1: Talking about your Topics

Find a partner – preferably someone you don’t know. After you have introduced yourselves, spend about a minute to tell your new friend about your research topic as succinctly and as completely as you can. You can of course use the preparation work you have already done in the Pre Session activities.

Then the person you’re telling should have enough information about your topic to be able to identify back to you the most important concepts in the topic and write them down. There should be a central concept but might be 2, 3 or 4 altogether.

At some stage, you will possibly need to also develop a **Research question** – if you haven’t already. The research question can also be a good source to identify the major concepts of your topic. It doesn’t have to be perfect or your final question – as you will probably tease that out with your supervisor – but knowing what your research question is – is useful to identify your search terms.

Swap over and let the other person spend a minute to explain their research topic etc.

(Time permitting) Share with the wider group what your main concepts are… Keep it brief but share the following:

- Your name
- Your partner’s name (first names are fine) and general discipline
- Up to 4 Main concepts in your partner’s topic

Activities 2: Create a Mind Map of your topic and 3: Build a list of synonyms and related terms (Pre Session Activities)
Activity 4: Keep a Record of your Searches (use this in the Workshops in the computer lab)

Once you have your topic represented by combinations of key words you can start trying some searches in individual databases. Don’t worry if you don’t have the perfect keywords yet, you can use these preliminary searches to help you identify further terms and concepts by looking at related literature to your topic. These additional terms can be used in subsequent searches… which you can keep changing until you are happy with the result. Therefore it is an iterative process.

The databases you choose to search will depend on your topic and your friendly librarian will be able to advise. Some people like to start with a ‘quick and dirty’ search in Google Scholar to get a general feel for the types of literature which might be written and also the specific terminology used for the key concepts. (UTS Library’s “Find Articles” is a good alternative). Others prefer to start with a familiar subject specific database. Whatever you do, keep a record of each search – perhaps in a table like the one below. Include the database, key terms searched, how many results were retrieved. And to help you evaluate the usefulness of each search, record how many of those results were items you think you might actually want to read in relation to your research topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Useful results</th>
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<td>1 Feb</td>
<td>CINAHL</td>
<td>(Adverse events OR Medical errors) AND (Perioperative OR surgery OR surgic*) AND (Patient safety OR surgical count)</td>
<td>179</td>
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You might also wish to consider what other limits you want to include … for instance are you only interested in research articles? Should there be a limited date range for when the articles were published? Language English? Peer Reviewed journals?

Once you start scanning down lists of results in databases, it may also be useful to start developing a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. These are the things you will discover in the course of selecting the relevant articles in the results lists. What do you want the useful articles to include? And what are the things which you want to avoid/exclude? By doing this, it will help you to be more consistent with your selection process.

Keep a record of the relevant looking articles you find by exporting to your favourite reference management software (eg Endnote or RefWorks).
Further Reading


Jesson, J., Lacey, F.M. & Matheson, L. 2011, Doing your literature review : traditional and systematic techniques, Sage, Los Angeles, Calif. ; London.


Also:

UTS Library Research Blog post, 27 September 2013

UTS Library Research, Finding and Managing Information,