Starting your Search

Begin by thinking of some keywords related to your topic. Think of the major concepts in your research question and some terms that can be used to describe those concepts. Use your keywords to search library databases for relevant articles.

**Example**

**Topic:** What role do school vending machines play in childhood obesity?

**Keywords:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept #1</th>
<th>Concept #2</th>
<th>Concept #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vending machines</td>
<td>obesity</td>
<td>schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food services</td>
<td>eating behaviours</td>
<td>students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snack food</td>
<td>eating behaviors</td>
<td>elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(remember spelling differs by country)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carbonated beverages</td>
<td></td>
<td>primary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft drinks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use Boolean operators to combine your keywords into different searches in a library database. (Hint: use AND to combine words in rows, and OR to combine words in columns). Quotation marks "" keep words together in the order you have typed them, and the asterisk * at the end of a word looks for multiple endings. To limit your search by the age of the study participants, use the age limits in CINAHL, Medline, or PsycINFO. The databases CINAHL and MEDLINE are great databases to use but, depending on your topic, you should look at other databases, as well.

E.g.
In-Depth Searching

When conducting a search, you will often find a small number of articles that focus very clearly on your topic. You can use these articles to help you find additional related research. There are a number of ways that you can do this:

1. **Author and journal search**

Most researchers focus on only a few specific areas of research. If you find a particularly relevant article, see if the author(s) has published other papers on the same topic. Search for the name of the author(s) in a relevant database. Similarly, many journals are dedicated to very specific topics. If you find a journal that focuses on your area of research, combine the title of the journal with your keywords to narrow your search.

2. **Subject search**

Library databases use subject headings to describe articles in the database. Subject headings are similar to keywords, but are chosen from a very specific list. The purpose of subject headings is to ensure that the terminology used to describe articles is consistent.

If you find a relevant article in a library database, look at the subject headings used to describe the article. If the subject headings in the database are different from the keywords that you are using, you can incorporate them into your search. This will help you ‘speak the same language’ as the database.
3. References

Just like you’ll be referencing articles that you use in your literature review, the articles themselves will have reference lists of other related research. When you are reading the articles, look for references to other research that might be relevant. Use the reference list to locate the article.

4. Cited reference searching

Just as the articles that you have found have cited previous research, they may also have been referenced by other researchers since they were published. Since researchers usually reference articles that are about similar topics, these newer articles might be relevant to your research.

Let’s say, for example, that you find an article published in 2010 that has 25 references. All 25 references must have been published before 2010. It’s possible, though, that your article has been cited by other researchers 2, 3, or even 10 times since 2010. All together, these articles form a citation chain of related research – sort of like a family tree.

Several (not all) library databases will tell you if an article has been cited since it’s been published. Look for a ‘Times Cited’ or similar link and click on it to view citing articles. The databases CINAHL, Web of Science, and Scopus are particularly useful for determining how many times your article has been cited.
Example #1: CINAHL

5. An overview of pediatric obesity. (Includes abstract); Lee WW; Pediatric Diabetes, 2007 Dec; 8 Suppl 9: 76-87 (journal article) ISSN: 1999-543X PMID: 17591136
Subjects: Health Promotion; Obesity; Adult: 19-44 years; Child: 6-12 years
Database: CINAHL Plus with Full Text
- Add to folder
- Times Cited in this Database: (5)
- PDF Full Text

6. Parents’ perceptions of curricular issues affecting children’s weight in elementary schools. (Includes abstract); Munson J, Price JH, Talljohann SK; Daley JA; Boardley D; Journal of School Health, 2006 Dec; 76 (10): 502-11 (journal article - research, tables/charts) ISSN: 0022-4804 PMID: 17095623
Subjects: Obesity; Parental Attitudes; Parents; School Health Services; Adult: 19-44 years; Child, Preschool: 2-5 years; Middle Aged: 45-64 years; Female; Male
Database: CINAHL Plus with Full Text
- Add to folder
- Cited References: (52)
- Times Cited in this Database: (5)
- HTML Full Text
- PDF Full Text (119.3KB)

Example #2: Web of Science

- Times Cited Link

Need help?

You are welcome to contact Cari with questions or to make individual appointments. She can be reached by email at cmerkley@mtroyal.ca or by phone at 403-440-5068 from Monday to Friday. You can also visit the library information desk or use our online chat service for assistance.