

Database Search Tips

You are probably used to searching Google. But databases are different animals, and if you search them as if they are Google you might not find much. Here are some quick tips:

Spelling counts. Some databases won't correct your spelling, so if you come up with zero results, maybe you just misspelled something.

Keep it simple. Search for only two or three words at a time, not whole sentences.

Some words belong together. If you are searching for articles that contain a particular phrase, like "back pain," be sure to put quotation marks around the words you want to stay together. Otherwise, you might get articles that don't mention "back pain." Instead they mention the word *back* in one part of the article and the word *pain* in another part.

Try this wild trick. If you are using a word that has more than one different ending, like **prescribe** or **prescription**, type just the first part of the word, then put an asterisk (*) right next to it, like this: **prescri*** Then you'll get articles that mention either word. This technique is called *truncation*. Just think how many words start with **psych*** !

Only the important words. Only use the words that most describe your topic, not other topics. For example, you wouldn't want to use the words *the, an, a, or, for, of, from, to,* or even *effects* or *how*. These words could be applied to any topic, so they usually won't help.

Try, try again. If your search doesn't bring back enough results the first time, use other words that mean similar things or change the focus just slightly.

Wikipedia can help. If you're not sure what words to use, check other websites like Wikipedia or a thesaurus or an online Library encyclopedia to find words to search for in the databases. As you search, you'll find more words. Write them down as you go.

Envision your perfect article. What words would be in the title of the article or in its summary? A good strategy is to write down a question that describes what you want to know:

Should the main purpose of a college education be job training or personal enrichment?

Start with the important words: *college* and *job training* and *personal enrichment*, then brainstorm other synonyms or related concepts. Here are examples, but there are more:

<u>college</u>	<u>"job training"</u>	<u>"personal enrichment"</u>
university	employment	"continuing education"
"higher education"	careers	"lifelong learning"
undergraduate	technical	"liberal education"
"community college"	professional	"liberal arts"

Different authors describe the same thing in different ways depending on who they are writing for and the context of the article. Each of these words and phrases in different combinations will bring back different search results. Here are some example searches:

college "job training"

university "liberal arts"

"community college" technical