

Bracken Business Communications Clinic

Searching for Research Materials

When would it be appropriate to search the world-wide web?

- Personal use
- Professional use for popular culture, local information, people
- Rare or obscure topics... sometimes
- Very current and *emerging* topics
- Medical questions for lay folks (e.g., *WebMD or MedlinePlus.gov*)
- Standard facts and stats: almanacs and government sources

Why select an academic database?

- Authority and credibility are paramount
- Support for research
- Need for journal articles

How does one search efficiently and effectively?

- *Accessing a University database:* Library home (www.lib.montana.edu) → FIND → Articles and Research Databases → and then choose By Subject (e.g., Business) *or* By Format (e.g., Company/Industry Profiles) *or* browse alphabetical listing by title (e.g., select B → **Business Source Complete**).
- *Selecting an appropriate database:* There is no single best database for all enquiries. **Business Source Complete** is terrific for many business-related topics but is *only one* of many databases that are available through the library and may not be the best one for non-business topics. **Academic Search Complete** is a solid, general-purpose social sciences index and would be a better option for non-business questions. If you are in a specific topical area, select the database that would be focused on that subject.
- *Entering search terms:* Input different, discreet topics or facets of the search in different search boxes, and then use the drop-down menu to select in which *fields to search*. The default in many databases is to search in subject-focused fields of title, abstract and subject terms; but don't assume this, so either confirm or select the field(s).
- *Connecting terms:* Select different connecting (Boolean) operators to manage the precision of returned results. Often these will be selectable somewhere near the search-term boxes. ANDing and NOTing will lead to fewer, more-focused results and smaller results sets. ORing will lead to more, broader results and larger results sets.
- *Narrowing results:* Typically initial returned sets will be large, so additional steps will be needed to narrow them. Use the selectable tools often found on the left side of the returned-results page. For example, sets can be narrowed by date, subject headings, geographic areas, whether scholarly or peer reviewed, and others.

Are there strategies that could be followed when searching?

- *Yes!* A searcher could opt to use very broad term(s) (e.g., “fish”), providing the widest recall, and then narrow the results by using more-precise terms and filtering tools (e.g., date, types of publication and so on). Additionally, using OR to connect search terms will lead to more, broader results and larger result sets.
- A searcher could opt to use as precise a term or terms as possible (e.g., “Rainbow trout”), providing the most precision; and if this proves too narrow, then broaden the search. Additionally, using AND and/or NOT to connect search terms will lead to fewer, more-focused results and smaller result sets.
- Use subject terms found in useful articles to extend or narrow the search.

How can sources be evaluated?

- **Authority:** Does this person/group know what they are talking about?
- **Bias:** Is the source objective? Is it all opinion or are there facts? How can you tell?
- **Content:** Is the information useful or relevant to my topic/claim?
- **Currency:** Is the information timely?
... or remember the **ABCCs**

Does the government publish information?

- *Yes!* Federal, state and local governments all have searchable databases that contain valuable, authoritative information.
- Two great federal examples are www.census.gov for information about population, housing, education, and other subjects; and www.bea.gov (Bureau of Economic Analysis) for information about different aspects of the nation’s economy.

This is all way too confusing. Is help available?

Yes! The reference librarians at Renne Library can be of great assistance in getting a searcher started or in refining one’s efforts. Library guides are available online at the Library site, as well as many course-specific aides.