

Database Tip Sheet: Finding Journal, Magazine, and Newspaper Articles

WHERE TO FIND DATABASES

Databases can be found at: <http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Library/Resources/Databases.aspx>, or by selecting the “Articles & More” tab from the library’s homepage (<http://www.mhc.ab.ca/library>).

NOTE: To access databases off-campus, you will need to login with your student identification number.

WHAT ARE DATABASES?

- ~ Databases are collections of periodicals (i.e., academic journals, magazines, and newspapers).
- ~ Different databases provide different levels of article information. Some databases provide:
 - *Citations*, which provide: article title, author, publication and date of publication—this is the lowest level of information provided by a database.
 - *Abstracts* are similar to a citation, but with a brief summary (typically a paragraph) of the article.
 - *Full Text* provides you with the full article as it appeared in print; so you will not need to go any further than the database for your information.
- ~ Both citations and abstracts require you to take an extra step and find the article in full text (whether it is in another database, in print in the library, or acquired via interlibrary loan (ILL)).
- ~ It should be noted that some databases provide all levels of article information—citation, abstract, and full text. Options usually exist to filter the various levels of information.

DATABASE SELECTION

Medicine Hat College Library Services offers more than 70 databases to meet research needs across all academic disciplines—from the arts to the sciences. Browse the database list, read the descriptions, and select one (or more) that is appropriate for you.

The databases have been conveniently divided into subject categories as well; this allows you to concentrate your research efforts. If you are unsure of where to begin, we suggest that you try any of the databases under the *General/Multidisciplinary* subject heading—*Academic Search Complete* is a good database to begin any search.

SEARCHING

Each database uses a unique set of search patterns, symbols, and terms. It is wise to consult the database’s help feature, especially when you use a database that is unfamiliar to you. The help pages are filled with a multitude of tip and tricks—which will help you find your information effectively and efficiently.

1. Search Symbols & Terms

- ~ Some databases use certain symbols as a means of expanding or narrowing searches. Symbols that might be used are: +, -, ?, *, and “...”. E.g., *heart +surgery* might find articles where heart and surgery appear anywhere in an article; *heart -surgery* might find articles with the word heart, but exclude those with the word *surgery*; “*heart surgery*” might find articles where the phrase *heart surgery* appears.

- ~ Others use Boolean Operators—the words AND, OR, and NOT—which can be used to expand and narrow searches. E.g., *Heart AND surgery* will find articles where the words *heart* and *surgery* appear in the same article—AND helps to narrow your search. *Heart OR surgery* will retrieve all articles where the words *heart* and *surgery* appear—OR helps expand your search. *Heart NOT cardiac* will find articles where *heart* appears, but excludes those where *cardiac* appears (even if the word *heart* appears in the article)—this will narrow your search, but should be done cautiously and rarely.

2. Fill in the Blanks

- ~ Some databases do the work for you—as far as requiring symbols or Boolean Operators. You might only need to fill in the blank spaces (with your search terms) to do your searching.

3. What words to Use

- ~ Try to use the simplest term possible. Start broad, using only one word to start. Use more terms as needed (connecting terms with Boolean Operators or symbols) to narrow the search.
- ~ Avoid using too many terms. Three terms are usually sufficient when conducting a search. Using an excessive amount of terms might narrow your search too much.
- ~ Mix and match different terms if your initial searches are unsuccessful. A thesaurus is an excellent tool in these instances. Some databases will have a built-in thesaurus. E.g., heart attack: *cardiac arrest*, *coronary*, *myocardial infarction*, etc.

4. Finding Academic Material

- ~ Databases are not exclusively academic material. Databases will include a variety of material; which includes: academic journals, popular magazines, trade magazines, and newspapers.
- ~ Many databases offer the option of limiting your search to peer review materials—this usually appears in the form of a check box. This refers to material that has gone through an academic review process before it is printed. Ideally, several academics in a field of study have reviewed the article before it has been printed; those academics might submit editorial comments and corrections. Once editorial corrections and suggestions are incorporated, the article will be published. Some other terms for peer review might be: *academic journals*, *blind review*, *juried*, *refereed*, or *scholarly journals*.
- ~ Even if you select the peer reviewed option, some articles might not be. You must deduce their validity—critical thinking is a must. You can see a librarian or reference clerk for help in evaluating articles.

LITERATURE REVIEW ARTICLES

Literature reviews are a type of article where an author, or authors, collect the latest research in a particular field of study and organize it into a coherent format. These types of articles are meant to convey the “state of the art” for a particular field of study.

There are many benefits to locating and employing literature reviews. Some of the things that you can learn from literature review articles include:

- ~ Major scholars in the field of study
- ~ Major advances and discoveries
- ~ Gaps in research
- ~ Debates in the field
- ~ Potential insight into future developments and trends
- ~ Acts as a bibliography for those cited materials

To locate literature reviews, select the checkbox option (if available) in a database, or add the phrases “literature review” or “review article” to your list of search terms.

PRINT/SAVE/E-MAIL

- ~ Never select File>Print (in menu bar) or click the print icon in your Web browser toolbar to print an article. Always look for the print icon/option in the database's display. This option will format the page for a proper printout. Failing to do so could result in pages being blank, cutoff, or incomplete.
- ~ To save a file properly, look for a save icon/option in the database's window—not in the menu bars or toolbars.
- ~ Most databases offer the option of e-mailing articles. This is done in the same way that printing or saving is done. A link usually exists, in the database window, which offers the option to e-mail.



(http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Library/Get_Assistance/Find_It.aspx)

Find It is a collection of tools that will help you locate periodical titles from within the databases. The components that you might employ most often are the *Periodical Link Resolver* and the *Interlibrary Loan Request*—both of which are embedded in the databases. They will help you locate full-text articles in other databases or place interlibrary loans. For more information on the service, visit: http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Library/Get_Assistance/Find_It.aspx.

INTERLIBRARY LOANS (http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Library/Services/Interlibrary_Loan.aspx)

- ~ No single library is capable of holding all electronic or print resources. So libraries have developed a system where resources can be shared—this is called Interlibrary Loans (ILL). Items (books, journal articles, etc.) can be obtained from other libraries; but please keep your time frame in mind when placing requests. On average, requests are filled in 7-10 working days, so plan accordingly.
- ~ Interlibrary loan requests can be made at: <http://relaisill.com/ammc/loginp.jsp>

THE ALBERTA LIBRARY CARD (TAL)

- ~ The Alberta Library Card (TAL) is a card that allows you to check out books from other libraries. The service is free and can be issued by your home library.
- ~ To get the TAL card, see the Circulation Desk in the library for more details.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ~ Write down what terms you used to conduct your search and in what database you used those terms.
- ~ Mix and match different terms—you might be surprised by the different search yields.
- ~ Do not rely on one method of retrieval—take notes at all stages of the research process. If you do not print the article immediately, save it to disk, or e-mail it. Use at least two of these methods to secure your hard earned research, because nothing is more frustrating than finding your dream article and losing it.
- ~ Other libraries have different databases; you can go to them and use those databases.

ONLINE RESOURCE

- ~ The MHC Library Services' *How-to and Research Guides* page: http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Library/Get_Assistance/How-To_Guides.aspx
- ~ The University of Lethbridge Library's *How to Guides* page: <http://www.uleth.ca/lib/guides/>

JOURNALS VS. MAGAZINES

	SCHOLARLY JOURNALS	POPULAR MAGAZINES
EXAMPLES	<i>Sport History Review, Social Work in Education, American Journal of Psychology, Molecular Biology</i>	<i>Time, Maclean's, Newsweek, People, Men's Health, Sports Illustrated</i>
TARGET AUDIENCE	Highly-educated, specialized audience familiar with a specialized vocabulary, technical language or jargon.	Written in plain language for a broad, general audience. Technical terms used are generally defined
CONTENTS	Often cover a specific area of study. e.g. sociology, library science, biochemistry etc. Purpose is to report on original research In-depth treatment of a narrow topic.	Often cover various subjects within a single magazine. Purpose is to provide general information or to entertain; often express public opinion. Coverage is often superficial with little historical perspective.
AUTHORSHIP	Scholars in field; their credentials are usually provided as is their funding source Citations provide; reference to earlier, relevant work. Submissions are peer reviewed/ refereed prior to inclusion. Published by learned society, association, University presses etc.	Professional journalists, staff or freelance. Citations not provided. Not peer reviewed. Published by commercial publisher.
APPEARANCE	Limited advertising that relates to specific area of study. Graphics used to explain or clarify, generally limited to charts, graphs, tables, diagrams. Continuous flow of articles, formal layout including an abstract, section headings and conclusion. Continuous pagination for the entire volume.	Lots of advertising not always related to the subject of the articles. Inclusion of photographs. Non-continuous flow of articles, and inclusion of "boxes" which contain off-shoots or more concise information. Each issue paginated separately.
ACCESS	Articles indexed in specialized abstracting tools and databases E.g., <i>Medline, BIOSIS, PsycLit.</i>	Articles indexed in general indexes and databases E.g., <i>Reader's Guide, ProQuest.</i>

Not every periodical falls neatly into one of these two categories:

TRADE JOURNALS such as *Nursing Times* or *Advertising Age* are published by professional or trade associations and are aimed at practitioners of those professions or trades.

INFORMED PERIODICALS such as *Scientific American* or *Psychology Today* are written by staff or freelance journalists for an educated but general audience.

From: <http://www.uleth.ca/lib/guides/framesets/chart.htm>

REMEMBER: See the library's Information Desk for your all your information and research needs. We are here to help, so do not be afraid to ask us questions.