

Literature Searching Strategy

Purpose:

- To define keywords and phrases for a research topic or question
- To identify relevant places to search for literature
- To search for literature systematically
- To locate relevant literature and refine your research question

Working through this sheet should result in a structured approach to your search. If you prefer, create a mind map or table to [record your search strategy](#). You might find tools like [Mendeley](#) or [Zotero](#) are useful for storing references as part of your strategy.

Undertaking a systematic review? [Read our webpage first](#).

My topic or research question

What words and phrases might people associate with this topic? Any synonyms? (a synonym is a word having the same or similar meaning as another e.g. happy/glad)

Books and Ebooks

Books can offer detail about the historical development of a subject, and ideas for new keywords for your search. You will have to use broader search terms to locate books and ebooks, which may have reference lists, chapters or sections of relevance within them.

Start your search at the [Library Services website](#) and keep it simple - you are looking for titles rather than detail. If you can, browse the library shelves at the shelf location which comes up most often in your search. The *Books and Media* tab will search the library catalogue for print books and a large number of ebooks. An *Ebooks* tab is also available. Most ebooks are hosted on [VLEbooks](#) and [ProQuest Ebook Central](#).

Write down the searches you will use to find books and ebooks

Books and shelf locations of relevance to my topic

(Harvard referencing requires the author, year, title, edition if later than 1st, place of publication and publisher. For edited books, write down the chapter authors, book editors and the start/end pages of the chapter.)

Journal articles

Journal articles are more focused than books and can bring you up to date on the latest research and critical analysis of issues related to your research or subject. Consider using one word or phrase from two or three of your identified concepts and swap them out systematically to see how this changes your results. This is where your recordkeeping will be crucial. Use the Articles tab in Library Search and consider searching research databases which are recommended on your [Subject Guide](#).

Write down your search

(Basic techniques include focusing your search using AND to combine words, widening your search to combine alternative terms with OR, and phrase searching with quotation marks.)

Journal articles relevant to my topic

(Harvard referencing requires the author(s), publication year, article title, journal title, volume and issue numbers (if available), start page and end page of the article, and a doi if available.)

Reflecting on the search

Note down any new keywords or phrases, or any relevant-looking journal titles, which have occurred to you during the search process.

Has this initial search of the literature helped to refine the research topic? Do you need to be broader or narrower in scope? Are there specific areas of interest to you?

Beyond Library Search

What other databases will you search for your topic?

Check your [Subject Guide](#) for recommendations or ask your Academic Liaison Librarian.

Other web-based resources

Google Scholar: book and article citations available through [Google Scholar](#) (*not recommended for systematic review methodology*).

Grey literature: papers and documents not published through usual academic or commercial routes e.g. Government documents and research reports. See your [Subject Guide](#) for recommendations.

Google search tips

- ❓ Can be useful for locating grey literature.
- ❓ Domains include **site:ac.uk** , **site:org.uk** , **site:gov.uk** – you can combine with keywords to search within specific types of websites in specific countries.
- ❓ Use the **Tools** button under the search box in Google to apply a custom date range.
- ❓ Google provides [a list of search operators](#), including proximity searching.

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