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# Moving Through the Research Process

You will want to approach any search that you embark on as a series of iterative steps.

## Step 1: Identify & focus your topic.

1. Write down your broad topic.
2. List some things you would like to research related to your topic.
3. Draft an opening research question.

For help with this, try Mind Mapping Your Topic.

## Step2: Select a starting database.

See our A-Z list of research databases.

## Step 3: Launch your reference manager and your annotation tool (if using).

See Citation Management Tools for help choosing a reference manager. Set up Hypothesis if you would like to use an annotation tool.

## Step 4: Identify keywords & construct search strings.

| Keyword | Synonyms |
|---|---|
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Combine your keywords into a "search string" to search the databases. Use your main keywords with "AND" or "OR" to narrow or expand your search.

Setting up a means of tracking your searches – nothing fancy – just the database and what the search was - you'll want to track these so that you don't inadvertently repeat searches.

| Search string | Database used |
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## Step 5: Scan the first set of results.

• Look at titles and publication dates to decide which articles you want to look at in depth.

• Select an article and begin the skimming and scanning process.

• If the list has too many **irrelevant results,** consider selecting different keywords and revising your search.

• If the list has **too many results,** consider setting date limiters or narrowing your results by searching phrases instead of keywords.

• If the list has **too few results,** consider selecting different keywords.

## Step 6: Dive into the first set of results.

Identify additional keywords by scanning the abstract and intro. Also look at the subjects or descriptors that are assigned to the article.




| Additional keywords |
| --- |
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Work through your list and save the articles that you want to read more thoroughly to your reference manager and then prepare to do another search.

## Step 7: Modify your search approach based on what your initial search produces.

Try another search using new keywords, or changing dates, or trying different search phrases. Follow the process that you did for your initial search.

## Step 8: Conduct a thorough search and move your search forward.

- Practice citation chaining. This allows you to see how ideas evolve over time. By looking at "works cited" pages, you can start to trace where ideas began, and by looking at the citing articles you can see where and how ideas are evolving.

- Look at works-cited pages and select articles that you want to engage with further. Locate these articles by pasting the article title into the UA Library search box.

- Paste the article title into Google Scholar and take a look at the articles that have cited it since it was published.

## Step 9: Identify patterns in the research and increase your focus.

As you conduct database searches on your research topic, you are likely to see specific articles, journals, and authors show up repeatedly.

These patterns are a cue that you should look for research related to your topic by examining the articles that are being cited and by searching the journals where the research is being published.

You should also conduct searches for specific authors that are working in your field of research.

| Additional articles, journals, and authors |
| --- |
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## Step 10: Write and synthesize.

Remember to avoid unintentional confirmation bias in your research by taking time to **engage with all perspectives related to a particular issue.** This is once step in ensuring that you are conducting a comprehensive search.

## Step 11: Cite your resources.

Use your citation manager to keep track of your citations.