

WRT 105: Introduction to the Library Databases

THE “HOW TO”:

- 1.) Go to <<http://library.syr.edu>>.
- 2.) Under “Find” click on the “**Databases**” link. (Once you know which database you’d like to use, you may simply search for that particular database by name.)
- 3.) You will be taken to a page that allows you to locate databases in several fashions. As you begin to familiarize yourself with the databases, the “**By Subject**” section will likely be most helpful because it allows you to search by discipline rather than database name, but you’ll notice that you can also search for databases by type, title and keyword in the panels on the left hand side. For our purposes, it might be most fruitful to start by looking at the general databases, so click on the “**Multidisciplinary**” link under **By Subject**. The page that comes up will be a list of all the databases within the field you selected (with ten showing at a time), in alphabetical order. Each database entry includes a brief description that explains the database’s holdings; use these descriptions to help determine which databases might be most helpful for your research, now and in the future.
- 4.) In the interest of time, I’m going to ask you to **go back** to the “Browse Database” page and search for a particular database I’d like you to start with for this assignment. In the search box at the top of the page, enter “**ProQuest Central**.” As the description indicates, Proquest Central “the largest aggregated database of periodical content. This award-winning online reference resource features a highly-respected, diversified mix of content including scholarly journals, trade publications, magazines, books, newspapers, reports and videos.” Click on the “**ProQuest Central**” link that appears on the following page.
- 5.) Now we’re in the actual database. For starters, it’s okay to use the Basic Search feature, but if you aren’t familiar with Boolean operators, you may want to use the Advanced Search feature (see the second tab). **Plug in what you see as the strongest combination of your search words.** [Please note that it’s often fruitful to think about the larger picture when developing your list of potential search terms. If you simply look for the literal subject you are covering (e.g. “Toddlers & Tiaras”), you may find that it’s very limiting, if not prohibitive, search phrase. Think about using more general terms that speak to the larger issues that are at stake (e.g. “American girls AND ‘performance’ AND femininity”).]

- 6.) What you do next will be dependent on the number of search results you encounter. If you only get a few (unfruitful) hits, then you'll probably want to reconsider your search terms and try a new combination or approach. If you encounter an overwhelming number of articles, you may want to try to make your search more specific. As you explore, try looking at the results by the genre of source (What's the difference between what the "Scholarly Journals" include versus the "Newspapers"?) and check out some of the suggested topics at the top of the page to see if they suit your search better.
- 7.) Remember that much of this is trial and error, and that research can be a time intensive part of the writing process. If you have difficulty with this, seek the support of the Writing Center or stop by my office hours for a little one-on-one assistance. You can also check out the library's digital tutorials (and the videos on "Finding Articles in Library Databases" and "Finding Full Text Articles" in particular given the kind of research that I'm asking of you). The tutorials are available at:
<http://library.syr.edu/services/getting_help/instruction/productive_researcher/index.php>.

SOME GENERAL TIPS:

- o Use Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT, "", etc.) in the advanced search box to narrow or broaden your search.
- o If you encounter a situation where you cannot access the actual full text of a promising article, click on the "SU Links" button included by the entry. The SU Links button will offer you a list of links to the other library holdings of that particular source (if they exist).
- o If you aren't having luck with ProQuest Central, you may want to explore another database. For this assignment, I'd suggest one of the following databases (and please note that the database names are followed by the SU library's "Resource Guide" descriptions of the databases):
 - OmniFile FT Mega: "Provides full text articles, with their accompanying indexing and abstracts, from the majority of our Wilson periodical databases."
 - Social Sciences Full Text: "covers sociology, social work, family studies, marriage and family therapy and more."
 - Sage Journals Online: "is especially strong in health, management, sociology, psychology and communications."
 - JSTOR: "Full-text articles from over 1,300 journals in Language and Literature, African American Studies, Film Studies, British Studies, and Folklore and many other areas."

- Academic OneFile: “Multidisciplinary resource providing access to peer reviewed journals and other resources in the sciences, engineering, business, as well as humanities and social sciences areas.”
 - Alt-Press Watch: “Full text of selected newspapers, magazines, and journals of the alternative and independent press.”
- o “Mybrary” is a another good resource for getting started. Use this link: <https://library.syr.edu/mybrary/> and—as you’ll notice—you need to enter your SU netID and password to use this resource. Once you log in, you’ll be directed to a page with a search window and several “results” boxes. What’s unusual about this resource is that it has the ability to search a number of places at once, so you can simultaneously take in what comes up in the library catalog (the books), in some of the general databases, and on the internet. It will also tell you if there are any databases or journals that might relate to your search term. This resource is particularly rich for enacting research as invention because it allows a researcher to easily and efficiently go back and forth between web resources and more scholarly sources, making connections, for example, between names and concepts referenced in an online encyclopedia or website, and names and concepts that appear in databases articles and/or books. And, Mybrary gives a researcher immediate access to new search terms (again, often through web resources) that she can plug into the search engine for quick—new and different— results. While Mybrary is great for getting a broad view of your topic, it’s not particularly good at locating articles because it retrieves a very limited number of results for each category. Use this tool to gain a working knowledge, and then move on to the actual library databases.
- o For your research outside our class, ask the professors in your field what databases they use to conduct their own research.