Getting Started

Sometimes knowing where to begin looking for information is the first hurdle for a research project. This guide is designed to give you some ideas about where to start searching. If you get stuck, please feel free to contact the Library. Library staff are available during all open hours to help you in person, by phone or by email. We really enjoy doing research and are always happy to help!

Definitions: Sources to try

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) explores the history of words through definitions, etymologies and quotations showing the use of a word over time.

Credo Reference is another source of definitions and quotations. Credo contains a variety of dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference books. You can type your word into the search box, then scroll through the results. If you prefer, you can also click on Find a Book, then look at the Dictionaries and Quotations options in the “General Reference” category. Clicking on each option will bring up a list of books, allowing you to search each one individually.

Examples & Evidence: Sources to try for facts, statistics, observations, and/or expert testimony

Academic/scholarly articles often contain facts, statistics, observations and expert points of view. The beginning of an academic article often covers the history of and previous research on the topic, and can be a good place to look for facts and statistics. When you are searching article databases from EBSCO, check the box next to “Scholarly (Peer-Reviewed) Journals” on the initial search screen to limit your results to academic articles. Most EBSCO databases will have scholarly articles, but Academic Search probably has the largest collection. (For more info about EBSCO, see our Tips handout.)

Opposing Viewpoints (OV) sometimes has statistical info. After you type in your search, look for the sidebar that breaks the results into different categories such as Viewpoints, Academic Journals, Primary Sources and Statistics. Click on Statistics to see tables/charts/etc. showing statistics on your topic.


Descriptions and Narratives: Sources to try

While you may find some in academic articles, you are more likely to find stories and other descriptions that bring a topic to life using newspaper and magazine articles. The best library databases will be MasterFILE and Newspaper Source. You will also find some in Opposing Viewpoints.

Compare & Contrast: Sources to try

Unfortunately most of our online dictionaries and thesauruses do not include antonyms. The library has a couple of antonym dictionaries on our reference collection, however: Funk & Wagnall’s Standard Handbook of Synonyms, Antonyms, and Prepositions (REF 424 F), Family Word Finder (REF 423.1 F35), and Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms… with Antonyms and… (REF 424 W). If you can’t stop by the Library, we would be happy to email you pages, etc. Just ask!
Depending on your topic, you may find Opposing Viewpoints helpful. It has articles covering different perspectives on controversial issues. The easiest way to see if Opposing Viewpoints might discuss your concept is to click on the Browse Issues tab and then scroll through the list of topics. If your concept is there, click on it and start exploring the articles they have to offer, paying special attention to those in the Featured Viewpoints section (each essay is specifically written to discuss one point of view on the issue).

### Cause / Effect Analysis: Sources to try

Keep an eye out for cause & effect as you review articles looking for Examples & Evidence, Description and Narratives.

Relationships such as cause and effect can be hard to capture in a database search box. If you try it, be sure to include the word *and* in between your relationship word(s) and your concept word(s). For example if you want to search for articles on the effects of poverty, type your search in like this: effects and poverty.

If that search doesn’t work, try brainstorming ideas for specific causes or effects. For example, perhaps you are specifically interested in the effect poverty has on educational levels. When you type in your search, leave out the relationship word (*effects*) and just type in the two related ideas: poverty and “educational level”. By typing in the search this way you are requiring that the database only show you articles that contain the word *poverty* and the phrase *educational level* (you are no longer trying to capture the relationship between them in your search words).

A couple of searching tips (you can find more on our Tips for Database Searching handout):

- When you are combining two or more ideas in your search, type the word *and* in between them: effects *and* poverty
- When you use a phrase of two or more words, put it in quotes so that the database will look for those words together and in that exact order: poverty and “educational level”
- The database’s default is to look for your search words in the title of the article, the authors’ names, the summary/abstract of the article and the subject terms assigned to the article. It is *not* searching the full text of all the articles. If you want to try that, go to the Advanced Search screen and set the Select a Field drop-down menu to “TX All Text”.

### Classification / Division: Sources to try

Credo Reference has a large number of subject dictionaries and encyclopedias that may offer a new perspective on your concept. See the tips in the Definition section for using Credo.

Try searching for your concept in some of our subject databases to see if the articles there approach your concept in a unique way. Here is a list of some of our subject databases (all are on our A-Z List of Databases page):

#### Health Databases
- AltHealth Watch
- CINAHL Plus
- Consumer Health Complete
- Health Source (Consumer Edition)
- Health Source (Nursing Edition)
- MEDLINE

#### Classification / Division: Sources to try
- America: History & Life
- Business Source Elite
- Regional Business News
- ERIC (education & teaching)
- Professional Development Collection (teaching)
- Military & Government Collection
- Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection
- Religion & Philosophy Collection

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