



BEST PRACTICE FOR LITERATURE SEARCHING

UTS: LIBRARY

What is a literature search?

A systematic and comprehensive method of finding relevant literature on your topic.

Why?

- Review existing theories and evidence
- Identify key authors and publications
- Identify current research / trends on your topic
- Help you to broaden or narrow your topic
- Identify research methodologies and models

How?

1. Background reading and preparation

Purpose: get an overview of your topic, a sense of terminology used, key authors or texts, find out what's already been explored in this area.

Methods:

- Google it!
- Google Scholar it!
- Use multidisciplinary databases to do a basic search like:
ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, Scopus, Web of Science
- Use subject dictionaries and encyclopedias

2. Scope your topic

Purpose: narrow / broaden your topic to fit the purpose of your literature search, identify what you need to find

Methods:

- Break your topic down into key concepts
- Identify related concepts and words
- Identify inclusion or exclusion criteria (e.g dates, geography, theories, methods, population)
- Identify literature types needed (e.g statistics, government data, multimedia, primary resources)

3. Identify search tools

Purpose: identify where you might find the literature needed

Methods:

- Use the Find Databases tool
- Use the Library's Study Guides
- Identify relevant web sites or related sites (e.g. government web sites, university repositories)

Stages of your search



4. Search

Purpose: take what you brainstormed in Step 2 to create a search strategy and then try it in your search tools from Step 3

Methods:

- a) Identify keywords
- b) Identify any exact phrases that may apply (e.g. "sustainable development")
- c) Identify if you need truncation or wildcards (e.g. sustainab* to find sustainable, sustainability)
- d) Combine your keywords using Boolean operators (AND OR NOT)
- e) Put your words together to run a search (e.g. "sustainable development" AND econom*)

5. Evaluate & Revise

Purpose: see if your search strategy brought back relevant results, and also revise your search as needed to improve it

Methods:

- Browse titles and abstracts
- Revise your search strategy as needed (e.g. broaden / narrow, add exclusions)
- Evaluate if you need to revise the list of search tools

6. Manage your results

Purpose: keep track of your search strategy and results so you can easily replicate further down the track

Methods:

- Use referencing software (e.g. EndNote, Refworks, Mendeley)
- Use a document to divide your results up (e.g. theory, methodology, results)
- Set up search alerts (e.g. Google Scholar alerts, database alerts, journal table of content alerts)