Consult general and subject-specific databases

Browsing subject headings and doing advanced searches in the library’s databases can help focus early stages of your research and uncover promising articles in your discipline.

For an overview of related key topics on using the library, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

Your library grants you access to both general and specific databases through its website and via their own search tools and pages.

General databases and search tools are helpful starting points: they give access early on in your research to articles, legal cases, statistics, and other materials from a huge range of disciplines. Your college likely subscribes to a few general databases, such as EBSCO Academic Search Premiere, InfoTrac Expanded Academic ASAP, JSTOR, LexisNexis Academic, and ProQuest SIRS. These search tools are broad in their scope and will help you find materials in a range of disciplines and subject areas. Many offer the full text of the materials they index.

Subject-specific databases are specialized and cover articles, indexes, news and legal information, and compilations of other information related to a particular subject or discipline.

All college libraries provide this kind of access, but note that the specific databases your library subscribes to will vary. Many libraries organize their database offerings by discipline or subject headings, making it easier to locate those most relevant to your project.

SEARCH FOR DATABASES AND RESEARCH HELP BY SUBJECT: SAMPLE DIRECTORY

Visit your own library’s homepage for an overview of the databases available and subjects covered. You may also find specially gathered resources from and online access to the librarian dedicated to your subject area.
Learn It

Your library is likely to offer you access to useful general database services. Use these general services to search for sources that range across more than one discipline. The most useful include access to the full text of articles.

More specialized databases provide you with access to materials in a particular discipline or group of fields. Your library will offer a large selection of specialized or single-subject databases. Some examples of specialized databases in specific subject areas include:

- *EconLit*, for economics
- *ERIC*, for education
- *MLA International Bibliography*, for modern languages, literature, linguistics
- *PAIS*, for public affairs
- *PsycINFO*, for psychology
- *PubMed*, for medical research
- *SocINDEX*, for sociology

While some specialized databases will offer full-text articles, others offer short abstracts and bibliographical information. When choosing among databases, look over the kinds of publications included; keep in mind that you may need to allow time to locate the full text of an article that is not available online. Also, when using a database for the first time, check for specific advice on crafting effective searches.

Use It

Access your library’s site and locate a general database service (such as *Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP*, or another). Browse your library’s descriptions of these databases. Choose the one that includes journals or other sources that seem closest to your field or discipline.

Using a topic from a current research project, conduct a search for articles using your library’s database search tools. Use the database’s advanced search options to refine your results, narrowing the list using options (full text, publication date, scholarly sources, or any others that seem relevant to your project). Choose two or three articles that look promising and skim the description and publication information. If you’ve located the full text of an article, try saving or downloading it. If an article is only listed with an abstract, make a quick plan for how you might access the complete source. If a source is too old to be included in the database, is it available in print? Via interlibrary loan?