Using keyword searches in databases, you can locate the full text of articles or discover where you can find them.

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

Explore It

Databases are collections of digitized publications—journal, magazine, and newspaper articles, books, and reports—arranged for easy access. Some databases offer “full-text” items, meaning the complete works are available online. Others offer summaries or short abstracts along with bibliographic records (author, title, and publication information), requiring you to locate the texts elsewhere.

CREDIT: Gale Virtual Reference Library (accessed via MU Libraries, University of Missouri).
Some database services (for example, *Expanded Academic ASAP* or *LexisNexis Academic Universe*) cover many subject areas. Other databases (for example, *PsycINFO* or *Sociological Abstracts*) are limited to one subject area or group of areas and disciplines treated in great detail. At the start of your project you might find it helpful to begin searching a general database that includes full-text articles and then move on to a more specialized database that covers your subject in more detail. Your library may also offer a tool that allows you to find materials from multiple databases with one search.

Libraries subscribe to these databases and provide them for use to current students. For access to these and other library resources, the library site will ask for information verifying that you are enrolled when you log on.

To access older periodicals that are not included among the resources indexed by these databases (generally those published before the 1980s), you might have to consult print indexes in the reference section of your library. For help locating and using these print versions, consult a librarian.

**Learn It**

A keyword search is the best way to find articles and other resources using a database. Start with key terms related to your topic along with their synonyms to discover the best, most productive search terms and phrases. If your search is too broad, returning too many sources or too many that are not appropriate to your project, narrow your search using the advanced search options. An advanced search allows you to combine keywords and craft a more specific or complex search phrase. Many databases also allow you to limit your results to full-text items, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, or by type, date, or other features.

If your searches are providing too many results or not enough good materials, try these suggestions:

- Use precise, specific keywords to focus your search on your intended topic and to eliminate results on similar topics.
- Enter both singular and plural keywords when appropriate (for example, *printing press* and *printing presses*).
- Avoid using a lengthy string of keywords; you’ll retrieve large amounts of irrelevant information.
- Use Boolean operators—AND, OR, NOT, quotation marks, or parentheses—and other limiting options (for example, “writing center” will return more relevant results than entering *writing center*).
- Check for the option to narrow and search again within a long list of search results or add additional limits by date, document type, and so on.
- Enter both abbreviations and their full-word equivalents (for example, *USPS* and *United States Postal Service*).
- Try different spellings (for example, *honor* and *honour*).
Use It

Go to your library’s database pages and practice searching using keywords related to your current research project. Or, using Questia’s homepage, for example, use the main search window and customize it by clicking on Options. (Here you would use the options to change the keyword search with the limiters in the “Results should have . . .” column.) How do your results differ—do they expand, shrink, or change in another way—after you limit your search?