Using the Estelle M. Black Library: Searching Library Databases

The objective of this tutorial on library databases is to show you effective searching techniques. It is important to identify a database that covers the area of your research. Your ongoing success in finding sources in databases will be ensured by knowing how to do basic and advanced searches and also how to refine your search so that the articles that are retrieved from the database match the requirements of your research.

To find library databases click on the link to the Library pages from the college website or simply bookmark http://library.rvc.cc.il.us
The left side of the Library Home page includes a link called “Library Databases.” We’ll open the link to access A to Z or Subject lists of databases to which the library subscribes.

With subscriptions to more than sixty databases from about a dozen providers, the library has databases that cover a broad range of disciplines and career fields.

The description of each database often includes subject coverage, format of the articles, and the number of periodicals contained within. Some databases such as JSTOR and New York Times Historical provide extensive files of items published during the entire history of a publication. Others offer full text of articles published in the last fifteen or twenty years.

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Let’s look at the ArticleFirst database. It is listed as a General Database in the Library’s Subject List of Databases web page. Notice the description: “contains bibliographic citations of approximately 12,600 journals in science, technology, medicine, social science, business, the humanities, and popular culture.” The description indicates that full text of articles will not always be available within ArticleFirst. As you will see, though, you can limit your searches within ArticleFirst to full text only.

Let’s do a search in the ArticleFirst database. The topic is design changes that followed the crash of space shuttle Columbia in 2003. Because “Space Shuttle Discovery” comes to mind, it is the term used in ArticleFirst. Notice how quotation marks are used to set off the search term as a phrase. Also notice that the limit to full text box has been marked.
As results, two full text articles are displayed. Only the first one contains useful information on Space Shuttle Discovery.

When only a few search results are obtained, the choice of Database may be wrong. To see if more results are available another First Search database called WilsonSelectPlus was selected. Use of the same phrase in WilsonSelect produced 34 results. After looking at several of the articles, Space shuttles as a subject phrase as shown in the drop down boxes on the right side of the page. The result of using Space shuttles as a subject phrase was a surprising increase in number of articles. This time 11 articles in ArticleFirst and 45 in WilsonSelect were obtained.

The databases that are provided by First Search are searched from a common navigation platform. The original search in ArticleFirst was repeated by selecting the Tab for Articles in WilsonSelectPlus and the results are shown on the lower part of the screen. Unlike Article First, searches in WilsonSelectPlus generate results that are all full text. While ArticleFirst searches seven times more journals and magazines than WilsonSelectPlus, the results are often only citations without full text.
Basic and Advanced Search options are available in many databases. Databases with Advanced Searches often will have drop down menus which help you construct a search argument using AND, OR, and NOT and specify the terms in the argument search. Those include: subject phrases, keywords, or anywhere in the text of an article. If your sources must be within the past 5 years and peer reviewed, limits are entered. You can also specify the year or whether the articles must be peer reviewed. Peer reviewed articles are published in scholarly journals rather than magazines.

Academic Search Premier’s pages visually depict three aspects of searching: One—search terms; two—search options or fine turning; and three—limits by format, publication date, and scholarly articles only. The results can be narrowed and limited throughout the search process.

The Academic Search Premier database contains a Subject Term index. A term related to the topic of music styles was found in the Subject Term index. That term -- Music – philosophy and aesthetics—was entered into the search box and no other adjustments were made to the search. 225 results came back. The 2nd search was made much more specific. The articles could only appear in scholarly music journals and had to be full text. Narrowing and limiting the search reduced the number of results significantly—only 25 to look at.
Research Databases provide directions on the screen to print, e-mail, or save results. Among the icons shown is the “Cite” icon which shows article citation according to AMA, APA, MLA and Chicago/Turabian styles.

ProQuest is a major database provider. The Estelle M. Black Library subscribes to ProQuest Research Library, Career and Technical Education, and the New York Times Historical Collection.

ProQuest has icons on the article display page for printing, e-mail, and citation views. An icon called “copy link” allows the article to be bookmarked for further use. Full text – PDF files are often available. One reason to use PDF files is that the charts are shown just as presented in the magazine or print version of the article.
Ask a librarian for help choosing a database if the topic you are researching doesn’t fit neatly into one of the subjects listed. Pay particular attention to those databases listed as General (All) and General (Article database). Maybe the database is located there because it doesn’t fit neatly into another category.

In review, this presentation about research databases has provided tips for selection of databases to find journal, magazine, and newspaper sources. Widespread use of digital storage and retrieval of journal, magazine and newspaper articles is reflected in the library’s 60+ database subscriptions. Three major providers of databases—FirstSearch, EbscoHost, and ProQuest—have established platforms that are shown in the presentation. Searches are presented in order to demonstrate techniques of finding sources that are scholarly, current, and relevant to academic disciplines and careers. The features of library databases which help narrow and limit results are highlighted. Printing, e-mail, document delivery, and built-in citation tools add value to the databases.