

9. Introduction to Searching

If your students are just becoming familiar with searching for sources, particularly when using an academic database or catalog, use the following items that focus on database choice and keyword searches:

- Videos: The Searching Mindset
- Videos: Beginning Research with Wikipedia/Google
- Video: Choosing a Database
- Video: Exploration Strategies
- Video: Refining Search Results
- Video: Searching for Images

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Search Strategies

Have students discuss or brainstorm search strategies they use now. Focus on non-academic searching, like Google searches or how they search for fun. Have they seen patterns, discovered shortcuts, etc.?

Have students discuss how they find peer-reviewed or scholarly items outside of the library. What are hindrances to this process (for example, paywalls)? Why might the library resources be better to use in these cases?

Date Published

When searching for sources, why is the date feature important? What does it do? Are there subjects or instances when students need to limit to recent material? Older material? Specific decade?

Iterative Nature of the Research Process

As a researcher uncovers information, he/she may need to revise the topic or repeat searches with updated search terms. As the researcher outlines the argument, he/she may identify additional aspects for investigation and research.

ACTIVITIES

Databases

Have students identify two or more databases or related tools. Students should write out their thesis, keywords, and synonyms. Direct students to search in a library database, catalog, or discovery tool and

share observations. Compare this to search engines like Google. Have students explore similarities and differences in these tools.

Ask students to search for the same topic/subject in two databases. How did searching in each database work? Differences? Similarities? Search results? Numbers? Relevance? Was one a subject-specific database? Does that make a difference in search results? Have students present or write up a short report on their findings.

Thesis Statements and Keywords

Create a set of imaginary thesis statements. Have students pick out keywords, develop a list of synonyms and related terms, and select a few databases appropriate for the topic. They should provide reasoning behind their selections.

Tell students to search various keywords and synonyms in a library database and in Google. What did they discover about the importance of synonyms and multiple keywords in the databases? How about spelling in databases vs. Google?

Have students work in pairs that swap thesis statements. Students should create a list of keywords and synonyms for their partners, select a few appropriate databases or other resources, and locate at least one source for their partner's project. Have the student utilize the Send/Share function in a search tool to send their partner a link or copy of the source.

Search Scavenger Hunt

Have students retrieve sites with specific domain types relevant to the project they are working on and/or their area of study. For example, have them locate a specific government website (.gov) or an academic source by using Google Advanced Search.

Google Advanced Search

Have students conduct an advanced search in Google. Take note of their results. Compare them to the kinds of results they receive in the following activity (using controlled vocabulary to search scholarly databases). How do the search experiences and results compare?

Controlled Vocabulary

Instruct students to identify two or more databases or related tools. Students should write out their thesis, keywords, and synonyms. Within the database, have students utilize features related to controlled vocabulary to locate useful terminology. Students should make a list or chart of their keywords and the corresponding controlled vocabulary terms.

Real-Life Boolean Operators

Pick a topic and have students organize themselves into groups using Boolean operators (for example, students who are freshmen AND biology majors, students who live in the dorms OR are seniors, students who like English but are NOT English majors). Once the students are broken into groups, have them pick a topic to search and work together to choose a database, search for articles on their topic, refine their results using specific parameters (for example, only articles from the last 5 years, only peer-reviewed articles, etc.). Students then should use the thesaurus to look for different ways of wording their original keyword search, and with the same limiters as before, compare the results from the two different searches.

Within a database, have students work in pairs to explore Boolean operators, search strings, limiters, etc. Have them make use of any help features available. What helps, what seems too complicated to be useful, when might they use certain features, etc.?