

How do I find articles on a topic?

1. Selecting your Topic & Identifying Keywords
2. Choose a Database
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4. Locating the Article

1. Selecting your Topic & Identifying Keywords

Selecting your topic

Selecting a research topic is perhaps the most difficult part of doing research. When choosing a research topic, select a topic that you're curious about or one you like. If the topic is a very broad subject, you may need to focus your research on a particular area or aspect of that broad topic. For example, if you chose *education* as your topic, you could be researching for days because the topic education covers a huge amount of information. If you're still interested in that topic, choose a smaller area or subgroup of education, like preschool education or distance education. Narrowing down your topic to a particular area or subtopic will make it easier to research and write by the date your assignment is due.

Identifying keywords

Think about your topic, and pick out the main ideas or concepts in the topic. Then express each concept as an individual term or phrase. For example, your topic sentence might be "What is the effect of television violence on children?" The concepts or ideas in that sentence would be **effect**, **television violence**, and **children**. These terms or phrases are called **keywords**, and are the terms you'll use to search databases for articles and information on your topic.

2. Choose a Database

After you've decided on your topic and selected the keywords you'll use to do your research, you need to choose a database(s) to search. The best way to find a good database is to go to the **Pitt Digital Library** at <http://www.library.pitt.edu>, and click on Databases by Subject, listed under the **Find Articles & More** heading. Next, click on the subject you need, and you'll access a list of databases containing articles and information in that subject. If you're unsure which subject or which database to select, a reference librarian can help you choose the best databases for your research.

3. Searching the Database

The databases you will search have millions of articles and citations. If your keyword search is too general, you may end up with thousands of search results you'll have to wade through to find the information you want. Nobody has that kind of time, so you have to search smart. Here's how to use the linking words called Boolean operators to combine search terms.

Operators

Boolean operators are the linking words **and**, **or**, **not** that let you to link more than one topic or keyword together. Don't worry about the funky name, but these linking words will help you save research time by focusing your search to more of what you're looking for. Here's how they work:

and

If you get **too many results** . .

try narrowing down your results by using the operator **and** to combine more than one keyword or phrase.

Example: **cloning and ethics**

will find results containing both the terms *cloning* and *ethics*. Using **and** will narrow or focus your search because both terms must be present in the citation.

or

If you get **too few results** . .

try broadening your search by using the operator **or**. **Or** is useful if there is more than one way to refer to a topic.

Example:
capital punishment or death penalty

will find citations containing either the phrase *capital punishment*, or the phrase *death penalty*, or both.

not

Using the word **not** will exclude the presence of any term(s) that follow the **not**.

Example: **art not modern**

will find citations containing the term *art* but not the term *modern*. Use **not** carefully because sometimes using **not** may exclude useful material.

Using operators may take a little practice, but it will be worth it. Using operators in your searching can save you time and headaches. You can use them in almost any online resource, or even in you favorite Web search engine – just check the help screens to be sure. If you'd like a little help keyword searching with operators, ask a librarian to show you how to use them.

Selecting the citations you want

If the database you're searching offers the full text of articles you chose, you're in luck. You can print the articles, download them to a floppy disk, or email them to your email account. The instructions on how to do these things are in the database's help screens. But what do you do if all you have is a citation? When you find a citation you like that doesn't have the full article, the next step is to find out if the Pitt libraries have that journal.

4. Locating the Article

Many of the ULS databases offer the full text of the articles, but some databases may not offer full text articles. When you find a citation you like but doesn't have the full article, the next step is to find out if the Pitt libraries have that journal.

Access PITTCat at <http://pittcat.pitt.edu>, and go to the Author/Title search screen.

Type the magazine or newspaper title in the **Search for:** text box. If the title starts with an article (like the, a, an, de, la, el), drop the article and type in the rest of the title. For example, to find the magazine titled Ecological Research, you would type **ecological research**. Next, select the type of search you are going to do in the **Search by:** menu to the right of the Search for: text box. To start your search, click on the gray Search button at the bottom of the screen.

The screenshot shows the PITTCat search interface. At the top, it says 'UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH LIBRARIES' and 'PITTCat'. There are navigation buttons for 'New Search', 'Headings', 'Titles', 'History', 'Requests', 'My Library Record', and 'Exit'. Below that, it says 'Database Name: University of Pittsburgh'. The search interface has three tabs: 'Author/Title/Subject', 'Keyword', and 'Course Reserves'. Under 'Author/Title/Subject', there are three sections: '1. Search for:' with a text box containing 'ecological research', '2. Search by:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Title', and '3. Limit to (optional):' with a dropdown menu set to 'None'. At the bottom, there is a '50 records per page' dropdown, a 'Search' button, a 'Reset' button, and a 'Set Search Limits' button.

Search results will show a list of all magazines or newspapers with the title **ecological research**. Each entry will list a title and, to the right, on which campus that item is located. Below the item title, most entries will indicate which library it is in. To see the full catalog record, click on the Full Title of the item.

#	Journal Title <	Full Title	Publication Information	Library System
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	Ecological research	Ecological research	Sakura-mura, Iboraki, Japan : Ecological Society of Japan, 1986-	University Library System
	Location: Langley Library (217 Langley Hall) Serials Non-circ		Call Number: Status: Click on title for more information.	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	Ecological research [computer file]	Ecological research [computer file]	[Oxford] : Blackwell Science,	University Library System
	Location: Available Online		Call Number: Status: Click on title for more information.	

The catalog record will give you all the information you would need to locate that item. You will be given a description of the item, location information like the library and collection the item is in, which volumes and issues are available, and if there is an electronic subscription to the journal. If you want the ejournal, just click on the Web Access URL in the catalog record. For the paper journal, write down the location information – you'll need this to go find the journals on the library shelves.

The screenshot shows a catalog record for 'Ecological research'. The title is 'Ecological research.'. The title is 'Ecological research.'. The published information is 'Published: Sakura-mura, Iboraki, Japan : Ecological Society of Japan, 1986-'. The physical description is 'Physical Description: v. : ill. ; 26 cm.'. The LC Subject Heading(s) are 'Ecology--Periodicals.' and 'Ecology--Japan--Periodicals.'. The former title is 'Former Title: [Nihon Seitai Gakkai shi](#)'. The internet address is 'Internet Address: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/member/institutions/issuelist.asp>'. The access information is 'Access: [Access for Pitt and UPMC-affiliated users only](#)'. The location is 'Location: Langley Library (217 Langley Hall) Serials Non-circ'. The library has 'Library Has: v.15-16 (2000-2001)'. A red box with a white arrow points to a 'Link to ejournal' button.