Resources

@Your Library
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Sometimes, performing what seems to be a good enough simple search returns irrelevant or no results. This can occur when you are using keywords that are “Natural Language,” meaning that the keywords are familiar to you, but they are not terms that are indexed in the controlled vocabulary of the database.

Think of the database like a dictionary- You might be looking for information about “teens” but that keyword is indexed in the database as “adolescent.” Same concept, different terms. In this case, “teens” is an example of “Natural Language,” while “adolescent” is an example of the controlled vocabulary of the database.

In this guide, we’ll go over some easy ways to locate the best keywords and perform a search that returns your desired results.
Performing a Better Search

Starting from the library website http://library.alliant.edu, click “Databases” under the research tab.
Performing a Better Search

List of Research Databases

A - B - C - D - E - F - G - H - I - J - L - M - N - O - P - R - S - W

A
- Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) 🔗
- All HealthWatch (EBSCO) 🔗
- Annual Reviews 🔗
- APA PsyNet 🔗

B - C - D
- Business Source Complete (EBSCO) 🔗
- CALI: The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction
  Username and password authentication required. Please email the library to gain access.
- CARMA Video Library
  Username and password authentication required. Please email the library to gain access
- Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works 🔗
- Criminal Justice Periodical Index 🔗
- Dissertations and Theses 🔗

E
- eBook Collection (EBSCO) 🔗
  Previously NetLibrary
- library (ProQuest) 🔗
- EBSCOHost Research Databases 🔗

We’ll use EBSCO as an example, since you have the option to cross-search multiple databases with one search.
Performing a Better Search

By clicking “Select All” you can cross-search ALL EBSCO databases at once.

OR, you can read through the descriptions of each EBSCO database and make individual selections. If you are just starting, I recommend searching ALL. Click “Continue” when finished.
EXAMPLE SCENARIO: Let’s say you are looking for information about Psychologists’ take on racial profiling. If you started in PsycINFO using a natural language search of “Racial Profiling and Psychologists” you are likely to return few pertinent results because “Racial Profiling” is not a term indexed in the PsycINFO thesaurus (more on how to access the controlled vocabulary later). By cross-searching multiple databases, you have access to SEVERAL controlled vocabularies, one of which, in this case, has “racial profiling” indexed.

Type in your natural language keyword search, now cross-searching multiple databases.

Click on the title of a relevant article to review the indexed terms associated with its content.
Performing a Better Search

Look at the terms in BLUE listed as “Keywords” or “Subjects.” The terms in BLUE represent keywords indexed in the database’s controlled vocabulary that are associated with the article’s content. It is a good idea to write down these keywords to help you understand what types of words the database is looking for in executing a search. You might go back and start a new search that uses only controlled vocabulary from the database. For example, you might try a new search using “Racial Profiling” and “Professional Organizations” or “Stereotyped Attitudes” and “Psychology.” Building a good search takes practice, and this is a great way to do so!

To access the full text of the article, click the PDF link.


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Abstract: This article discusses the current debate over the Bush administration’s proposals for racial profiling, defined as police or security officials’ reliance upon racial stereotypes to target, search or detain people for criminal activity. It is noted that from an empirical standpoint, the mental health impact of racial profiling remains unknown. Ways psychologists are bolstering their efforts to address racial profiling will be the focus of the APA Annual Convention symposium “Racial profiling: a psychological exploration,” which will take place on Friday, Aug. 24, from 10 to 11:50 a.m. APA’s Committee on Urban Initiatives has assembled a diverse panel to bring policy, research, intervention and law-enforcement perspectives to the discussion of the roles psychologists can play in heightening awareness and ending racial profiling. The need for research into the effects of racial profiling, as well as into more effective ways that law enforcement can protect communities without propagating cultural bias, is discussed.

Keywords: racial profiling; government policy making; law enforcement; racial stereotyping; American Psychological Association Annual Convention; psychology; cultural bias

Subjects: Crime Prevention; Government Policy Making; Law Enforcement; Professional Organizations; Psychology; Race and Ethnic Discrimination; Response Bias; Scientific Communication; Stereotyped Attitudes
Performing a Better Search

Another good idea is to view the reference list of any relevant articles you find. You can then locate those articles in the databases and look at what indexed terms are associated with those articles (just as we did in the previous example).

When performing a search, you also have the option to look up terms in the controlled vocabulary and build a search using only controlled vocabulary terms. Let’s do that next!
To access the controlled vocabulary of a database while cross-searching multiple EBSCO databases, hover the mouse over the “Subjects” tab in the blue bar at the top of your screen. Each EBSCO database has its own list of indexed terms, and you can utilize any one you like. For our purposes, let’s use the ACADEMIC SEARCH PREMIER SUBJECT TERMS.
By typing in a simple search term such as “psychology” using the “term begins with” tab, we can get an idea of what sorts of terms the index has.

You can add a term from the database’s index to your search by checking the box next to the term, then clicking “Add.”
The indexed term “Psychology” is now added to your search.

You can now type in your second keyword to search the index.

To add your second term, click the box next to the keyword. Before you click “Add” decide if you want to pair your keywords using “OR” “AND” or “NOT”.
Once you have built your desired search using the controlled vocabulary of the database, click “Search”
Try different keywords when building a search with the controlled vocabulary of the database. If you type in “Racial Profiling” and don’t see the search terms you desire, try some other combinations: “Racism” “Racial Stereotyping” etc. The key to building a good search is understanding what the database is looking for, and the best way to learn that is through practice!