

## Research Strategies (abridged) - 4

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RESEARCH STRATEGIES - WILLIAM BADKE, COPYRIGHT 2008

Note that chapter order in the print edition will differ from the above. The online version will retain the former chapter divisions.

## 4

### *Making Your Way Through the Journal Maze*

[The material below is now is the second part of Chapter 5 of the print edition. It has been condensed for the online version, and several sections have been omitted].

### *Journal Databases*

Just when you thought that finding books was trouble enough, someone is sure to suggest to you that there's another whole world of research materials crying out for attention—*journals*. Actually, the whole category I'm thinking of is broader than that. Librarians, ever the stuffy folks we are, call them "periodicals," that is, materials that arrive in the library periodically, as opposed to a book that arrives only once. Included in the category is everything from newspapers to popular magazines (or e-zines) to scholarly journals. But I'm going to call them journals anyway, because the primary readers of this book are doing academic research that focuses on journals.

### **Some Background on the Journal Scene.**

Before we get to journal databases, let's clarify what makes journals different from books. The most significant difference is that you can't catalog a journal like you catalog a book. When a librarian gets a new book for the collection, the book is cataloged (i.e. has a catalog record created for it) and put

on the shelf. After that, there is nothing to do but sign the book out and check it back in until it falls apart. The cataloger's job is done.

But journal issues *keep on arriving* every week or month or quarter or year. By definition, they are *periodical*. You can't just create a descriptive record for them once and for all like you can a book, because they keep changing as more issues are added to the growing collection. While it might be possible

for a librarian to assign a subject heading to each article in each journal as it arrives and then to create a database so that you could find articles on any given topic, it just wouldn't be practical. No librarian has the time to create a separate database of all the library's journal articles.

The field of journals is governed by several categories, some of which are showing rapid change:

**Popular vs. Scholarly [more detail in print edition]**

**Print vs. Electronic [more detail in print edition]**

**Pay vs. Open Access [more detail in print edition]**

For searchable databases of open access journals, go to Open J-Gate (<http://www.openj-gate.com/>) or Directory of Open-Access Journals (<http://www.doaj.org/>).

## Introduction to Journal Databases

Even thinking of using journals in a research project may produce in you a shudder of horror. You imagine

sitting down in front of piles of printed journals, thumbing through each one in an anguished quest for something (anything!) on the "The Implications for Generation Y of Max Weber's Approach to the Sociology

of Cities." Hours later, in bitterness of heart and soul, you will emerge, red-eyed, with one article that is only vaguely relevant. Journal research used to be done that way when your grandfather was a wee lad in school. Now things are very different, due to the development of journal databases.

These databases are created this way: Indexers sit down in front of piles of print journals or their electronic equivalents (often related to a specific subject discipline, such as psychology or history or religion) and create a metadata record for each article. The metadata is loaded into the database, thus making it searchable. By doing a search, you can generate a list of articles from various journals that are relevant to the subject you are studying.

Approaching a journal database means first being able to "read" its *interface*. The interface is what you actually see on the computer screen when you search for the data in a journal database. It includes the screen display, search methods, and so on. Interfaces change constantly. Data doesn't. What this means

is that the screen may look different the next time you use the database. The instructions on use may be different. Even the methods you need to follow to search the index may be different. The data inside the database is the same, but the means you use to extract it may be brand new.

## How to Read an Interface [more detail in print edition]

- Go over any instructions on the screen.
- Start with a keyword search and identify 2 or 3 results that look like they are relevant to your research question/thesis.
- Click on the titles of these relevant articles, one by one, to open the full records.
- Are there suggested subject heading links beside or above the list of results? Are they hyperlinked?
- Look for a "Thesaurus," "Subjects," "Browse Subjects," or "Indexes" link.

- If you are going to search by keywords, what sorts of Boolean operators are in use in this database?  
Is phrase searching allowed?
- Try a search on a broad basis first, perhaps inputting a subject heading or only one keyword. If you get more than about 500 "hits" (citations to individual articles), look for a means to refine or narrow your search by adding more words.

Here is an interface from Academic Search Premier, an EBSCO journal database:

The screenshot shows the EBSCO Academic Search Premier interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: New Search, Publications, Subject Terms, Cited References, More, Sign In, Folder, Languages, and New Features!. Below this, the EBSCO logo is on the left. The main search area contains a search box with the text "Academic Search Premier" and a "Choose Databases >" link. To the right of the search box are "Search" and "Clear" buttons. Below the search box are links for "Search Options", "Basic Search", "Advanced Search", "Visual Search", "Search History/Alerts", and "Preferences >". A "Search Options" section is expanded, showing "Search modes" with radio buttons for "Boolean/Phrase", "Find all my search terms", "Find any of my search terms", and "SmartText Searching Hint". There are also checkboxes for "Apply related words" (checked), "Also search within the full text articles", "Full Text Only Results", and "Peer Reviewed/Refereed". Red arrows point to various elements: "Function to search within a single journal" points to "Publications"; "Subject heading search option" points to "Subject Terms"; "Name of the database" points to "Academic Search Premier"; "Basic search box" points to the search input field; "Advanced search option" points to "Advanced Search"; and "Optional search limiters" points to the "Search Options" section.

**Let's start with an example** [more detail in print edition]

## Some Tips on Journal Article Citations

A journal article citation is simply a description of an article with sufficient information to help you find it. While the format of a citation may vary, this is the information usually provided:

Badke, William. "Can't Get No Respect: Helping Faculty to Understand the Educational Power of Information Literacy." *The Reference Librarian* 43, no. 89/90 (2005): 63-80.

Here it is broken down:

Badke, William.—Author of the article.

"Can't Get No Respect: Helping Faculty to Understand the Educational Power of Information Literacy."—Title of the article.

*The Reference Librarian*—Name of the journal in which the article is found.

43—Volume number of the journal. Each new year gets a new volume number.

no. 89/90—Issue number. In this case, this is a double issue.

(2005)—Date the article was published.

63-80—Page numbers of the issue in which the article is found.

## **Journal Databases with Electronic Full Text** [more detail in print edition].

Rather than simply listing citations to various journal articles, full text databases add the actual text of the articles in electronic form—usually as HTML or PDF or both, the former looking like a re-typed document, and the latter looking like a photocopy of the original print version. Increasingly, journal databases are going to PDF only.

## **Approaching Journal Databases—Tips and Hints** [much more detail in print edition]

### **Be prepared for frustration**

### **Read the Interface**

### **Be aware that databases tend to be something of a black hole**

You send in a request, and the database tells you what it found (or didn't find). The database search program will rarely tell you what you did wrong.

### **Resist the urge to fill the search box with words**

### **Think about staging (faceting) your search**

### **Look for controlled vocabularies and advanced searches**

### **Think before you search**

### **Retrace your steps**

Be prepared to go back and figure out what you did wrong or how you could get better results.

### **When in doubt, read the instructions**

### **Remain calm**

### **Sometimes problems arise because you're using the wrong database**

### **Check out the possibilities of interlibrary loan**

## **Citation Searches, Related Articles and Reference Lists** **—Alternative Ways of Searching** [see print edition]

## **A First Adventure with a Real Live Journal Database** [see print

edition]

**Varieties of the Journal Database** [see print edition]

**Federated Search** [see print edition]



[For a study guide to this chapter along with practice exercises (and key) and assignment, see the **[see see print edition]** of this book]

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