

Literature search (Education)

Conduct a literature search

When you are given a topic for an assignment or dissertation you will want to identify and evaluate existing research that has been done on the topic. To do this you will need to conduct a literature search, a systematic and thorough search of all the material available on a topic.

To learn how to conduct an effective literature search you need to:

- Define the topic
- Identify keywords
- Build a search strategy
- Choose a database

Before you begin searching the literature it is important that you develop a search strategy. This tutorial will show you how to do this.

Define the topic

A search strategy begins with making sure that you fully understand what you are being asked to write about. You need to decide which the main concepts or ideas of the assignment topic are. These concepts will then help you to develop a set of keywords that can be used in your search.

Example

Research has shown that high quality pre-school provision can make a difference to children's achievement in school. Drawing on relevant research and other literature discuss the thinking underpinning this statement.

Find the two important concepts in the paragraph above.

- research
- high quality
- pre-school provision
- difference

- children's achievement

Identify keywords

Sometimes there will be only one way of expressing your topic and that is the word or phrase you will use to search. More often however there will be a number of different terms you could use. The idea is to choose as many relevant words or word forms as possible. This will maximise the number of references you can retrieve through your search.

Take each concept from your assignment title and think of alternative terms, synonyms or different ways of spelling a word.

See the possible search terms for children's achievement and pre-school provision:

Possible keywords

pre-school provision:

pre-school, preschool provision, early years, pre-school education, nursery school provision, early childhood education, infant education, playgroup

children's achievement:

children's attainment, childhood achievement, children's success

Combine keywords

Next you must combine the keywords to express the connections between them. Combining your search terms together is also known as Boolean search. You can do this using Boolean operators.

Watch a [video](#) for more information about this.

Build a search strategy 1

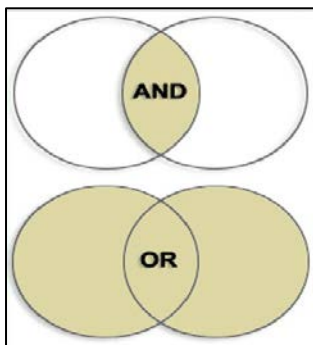
Follow these examples to show you how to combine your search terms using a number of different techniques. As you will see the techniques themselves can also be combined to refine your search further.

Example

Research has shown that high quality pre-school provision can make a difference to children's achievement in school. Drawing on relevant research and other literature discuss the thinking underpinning this statement.

Possible strategy

(pre-school OR early years) AND (children's achievement OR children's success)



Build a search strategy 2

Truncation allows you to search for multiple forms of a word. The generally accepted symbol for truncation in databases is an asterix (*).

Wildcards allow you to increase the breadth of a search by using the symbols '?' and '*' to replace individual letters, or sequences of letters, within the 'first names' and 'last name' fields. It is useful if you are unsure of the spelling, or cannot find what you are looking for with the usual spelling of a name.

Enhanced strategy

For more references you could change your search strategy to:

(pre-school OR early years) AND (child* a?ment OR child* success)

In addition to the Boolean operators this search includes truncation and wildcards.

Additional search techniques

There are several additional search techniques that you will find useful:

- Phrase search
- Field search
- Applying limiters

Phrase search

Phrase search allows users to search for documents containing an exact sentence or phrase opposed to being limited to keywords.

To do this place quotation marks (") around a specific phrase to indicate that you want to search for instances of that search query in the order you specified.

Field search

Searching in a database using different fields can be a powerful way to find relevant results. A field is a specific part of a record in a database.

Common fields that can be searched are:

- Author
- Title
- Subject
- Abstract

Author field

If you already know the author of a specific article, entering their Last Name, First Name in the author field will pull more relevant records than a keyword search.

This will ensure all results are articles written by the author and not articles about that author or just with that author's name mentioned anywhere in the record.

Apply limiters

Limiters let you narrow the focus of your search so that the information retrieved from the databases you search is limited according to the values you select. You can use more than one limiter if more than one is available.

Common limiters that can appear on Advanced Search include:

- Date
- Peer reviewed / academic journals
- Publication type
- Language / place

Example 1

This is a search in [Education Search Complete](#). On the left you can see some of the available limiters.

Current Search

Find all my search terms:
(pre-school OR early years)
AND (child* a?ment OR child* success)

Limit To

Full Text

References Available

Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals

1891 Publication Date 2017

Show More

Search Results: 1 - 20 of 1,352

1. 'Forest School is muddy and I like it': Perspectives of young children with autism spectrum disorders, their parents and educational professionals.

By: Bradley, Katherine; Male, Dawn. Educational & Child Psychology. Jun2017, Vol. 34 Issue 2, p80-93. 14p. 2 Illustrations. Abstract: Background: Forest School was introduced in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe in the 1950s and became a part of the Danish Early Years curriculum in the 1980s as a way of supporting children to understand the natural world while learning academic and practical skills. Since the introduction of the first Forest School in the United Kingdom (UK) in the early 1990s its popularity has been increasing. Method: The context of the study was an inner city special school catering for children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The aim was to explore the views of young children with ASD, parents and educational professionals about their Forest School experience. Four children, their parents and two educational professionals participated. All of the children had a primary

Example 2

This is the same search with limiters set for publication type, date and geographical location.

Note the vastly reduced number of hits.



Current Search

Find all my search terms:
(pre-school OR early years)
AND (child* a?ment OR child* success)

Limiters

References Available

Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals

Source Types

Academic Journals

Geography

united states

Search Results: 1 - 20 of 61

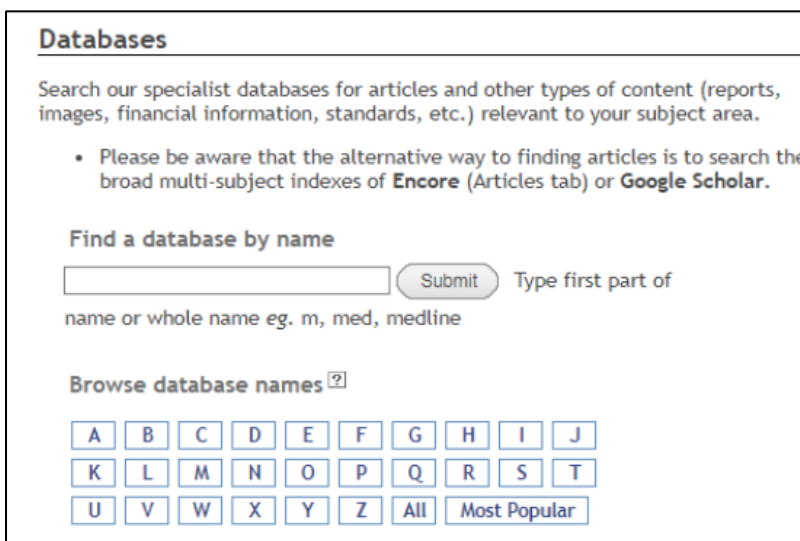
1. **Environmental and Economic Strategies for Primary Prevention of Cancer in Early Life.**

By: Kriebel, David; Hoppin, Polly J.; Jacobs, Molly M.; Clapp, Richard W.
Pediatrics. Nov2016 Supplement, Vol. 138, pS56-S64. 9p. Abstract: This article summarizes the evidence for environmental toxic exposures contributing to cancers in early life, focusing on the most common cancer sites in this age group. It provides examples of widespread avoidable exposures to human carcinogens through air, water, and food and then describes recent examples of successful initiatives to reduce exposure to chemicals linked to these cancer sites, through government policy, industry initiatives, and consumer activism. State government initiatives to reduce toxic chemical exposures have made important gains; the Toxics Use Reduction Act of Massachusetts is now 25 years old and has been a major success story. There are a growing number of corporate initiatives to eliminate toxics, especially carcinogens, from the products they manufacture and sell. Another important opportunity for cancer prevention is provided by online

Choose a database or resource

The Library has grouped resources by subject to help you find what you need more easily.

In [Education](#) and Childhood Studies there are excellent databases for finding articles for your assignments. These are listed by subject in the [databases](#) section of the Library catalogue. More information on databases can be found in the Sources section of [Education and Childhood Studies](#).



Databases

Search our specialist databases for articles and other types of content (reports, images, financial information, standards, etc.) relevant to your subject area.

- Please be aware that the alternative way to finding articles is to search the broad multi-subject indexes of **Encore** (Articles tab) or **Google Scholar**.

Find a database by name

Type first part of name or whole name eg. m, med, medline

Browse database names [?]

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y	Z	All	Most Popular		