Top 14 Remedial Database Search Techniques

What Do You Do When Your First Search Doesn’t Give You the Results You Want?

1. **Spell it [w]right!** – Did you hear about the student who complained that we had no books on “Shakspear”? Google may have Spell Check, but many databases don’t, so beware of bad spelling. Moreover, misspelling may retrieve the wrong subject. Capital/capitol, desert/dessert, stationary/stationery are potential mistakes that Spell Check won’t catch.

2. **More is Less!** - Limit you search by adding search terms. Try searching under Art? Way too many hits! But if you search under Art and France, the number of hits drops dramatically. You could narrow your search even more with a third search term - Baroque.

3. **Less is More!** - If you have too few hits, or none at all, try removing a search term.

4. **Find one, find many!** - If you find a good article, use the hyperlinks that come with the article to find similar articles. Articles commonly hyperlink to the same Author, Publication, or Subject(s).

5. **Think outside the box!** – Try searching under a different search term. Example: If Career doesn't work, try Vocation. Or Job. Or Profession. Or Occupation.

6. **Enlarge your box!** – If “tornado” doesn't find enough, ask yourself what is BIGGER than a “tornado?” Books on weather or disasters might contain a chapter on “tornadoes.”

7. **“OR” is powORful!** - Search for several search terms at once using the OR connector. That way it doesn't matter if one of your search terms doesn't work; your search can still retrieve articles under the other terms. Example: Career OR Vocation OR Profession

8. **Bigger is better!** - Expand your search from a Subject Search (the narrowest search), to a Title Search, to an Abstract Search, to a Full Text Search, and finally to a Keyword Search. Keyword Searches look in EVERY possible search field.

9. **Fish in a different pond!** - Try a different database.

10. **Fish in a bigger pond!** – The Mega Databases are huge and cover all topics!

11. **Fish in every pond!** – Use EhIS or one of the Power Search Engines to search across multiple databases at once.

12. **Learn the “Lingo!”** - Most databases have a “controlled vocabulary” of official search terms. For instance, if you were searching for “handicapped,” the topic may be called different things in different databases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Full Text</td>
<td>“Handicapped”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators Reference Complete</td>
<td>“Disabled persons”</td>
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The only way to know the official subject terms used by individual databases is to check their Thesaurus or Subject Index (usually located at the top of the search screen).

13. **Technology is your friend!** - Although the library’s Books and eBooks contain the same content, *Ebooks on EBSCOhost* is a much more powerful search tool than the Library Catalog. Even a Key Word Search in the Library Catalog only looks at the books’ Author, Title, Subject, and Note Fields. A Key Word search in *Ebooks on EBSCOhost* looks not only at the Author, Title, Subject, and Note Fields, but every single word in every single book.

Imagine searching for “echolalia” in the Library Catalog. Unless there is a book with that Title or Subject, you won’t find anything. And yet there are books in the library which discuss echolalia, and may even dedicate an entire chapter to that topic. To identify them, you would have to pull likely books off the shelf (say on the topic of Autism) and look in the Index for “echolalia”. The same book in *Ebooks on EBSCOhost* would be easy to find with a keyword search.

14. **Most important rule of all!** – Ask a Librarian. Remember example number one? That student might have left without finding any books on Shakespeare if he/she hadn’t asked a librarian for help. When you’ve reached your limits, ask for help and learn something new.