Information Now

a GRAPHIC guide to STUDENT RESEARCH

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WE’VE TALKED ABOUT CATALOGS, SO LET’S TALK ABOUT THAT OTHER LIBRARY RESOURCE I KEEP MENTIONING: DATABASES. DATABASES ARE SIMILAR TO CATALOGS IN THAT THEY’RE SEARCHABLE COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION. IN FACT, A CATALOG IS A KIND OF DATABASE.

WHEN WE USE THE TERM “DATABASE” IN A LIBRARY, THOUGH, WE’RE TALKING ABOUT A SYSTEM USED SPECIFICALLY TO ACCESS DIGITAL RESOURCES LIKE E-BOOKS, ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLES, IMAGES, COMPANY INFORMATION, AND ESPECIALLY ACADEMIC JOURNALS AND OTHER PERIODICALS.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION...

WHAT ARE PERIODICALS AND JOURNALS?

FIRST OF ALL, A PERIODICAL IS SOMETHING THAT COMES OUT PERIODICALLY. THAT EXPLAINS IT, HUH? PERIODICALS ARE ITEMS PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED EVERY DAY OR WEEK OR MONTH OR QUARTER OR YEAR... AND SO ON. THEY CAN BE MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, AND ACADEMIC JOURNALS. WHETHER THEY ARE PUBLISHED ONLINE, IN PRINT, OR BOTH. PERIODICALS ARE AN ONGOING PROCESS OF GENERATING NEW CONTENT AND CONTINUOUS PUBLICATION.

PERIODICALS USUALLY FALL INTO ONE OF THREE CATEGORIES: POPULAR, TRADE/PROFESSIONAL, OR SCHOLARLY/ACADEMIC/PEER-REVIEWED. EACH CATEGORY HAS DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS YOU SHOULD REMEMBER WHEN PERFORMING ACADEMIC RESEARCH.
POPULAR RESOURCES ARE, THE KIND OF MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS YOU SEE ON THE NEWSSTAND IN A BOOKSTORE OR GROCERY STORE. ALTHOUGH YOUR LIBRARY PROBABLY CARRIES MANY OF THEM AS WELL, EITHER ON THE SHELF OR IN ONLINE FORM.

POPULAR RESOURCES ATTRACTION READERS WITH GLOSSY PAPER (ON PRINT), BRIGHT COLORS, IMAGES, EYE-CATCHING DESIGNS, AND VIDEOS ONLINE. THEY PROBABLY FEATURE LOTS OF ADVERTISEMENTS. NEWSPAPERS USE TOPICS OF LOCAL INTEREST TO APPEAL TO READERS.

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS ARE PUBLISHED FREQUENTLY (MONTHLY, WEEKLY, EVEN DAILY EDITIONS COMFON). ONLINE PUBLICATIONS ARE UPDATED MULTIPLE TIMES DAILY. SEE, CURRENTS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN DETERMINING THE CONTENT IN POPULAR PUBLICATIONS. OFTEN AT THE EXPENSE OF ACCURACY. CURRENT ISSUES AND OPINION, NOT IN-DEPTH RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS, TEND TO MAKE UP THE BULK OF THESE PUBLICATIONS.

ARTICLES IN POPULAR PUBLICATIONS ARE WRITTEN BY JOURNALISTS FOR BROAD AUDIENCE—A PRIORITY FOR PUBLISHERS—but occasionally an expert or academic contributes a "SPECIAL" ARTICLE. THE LANGUAGE USED IN POPULAR ARTICLES IS LIGHT ON JARGON AND RARELY TECHNICAL, SINCE IT'S INTENDED FOR GENERAL AUDIENCES, AND ARTICLE TITLES ARE RELATIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD.

POPULAR ARTICLES DON'T USUALLY CONTAIN CITATIONS OR REFERENCES THAT WOULD ALLOW A READER TO VERIFY THE RESEARCH OF THE AUTHOR. DEPENDING ON THE PUBLICATION, EDITORS MIGHT REVIEW THE ARTICLE AND CORRECT ANY POTENTIAL ERRORS BEFORE IT'S PUBLISHED.

BOTTOM LINE: POPULAR PERIODICAL ARTICLES CAN SUMMARIZE A CURRENT TOPIC OR OPINION, BUT THEY CAN'T GIVE YOU AN IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF AN ISSUE OR MUCH MATERIAL SUITABLE FOR AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROJECT.

... AND THE EDITORS OF SOME POPULAR PUBLICATIONS AREN'T ALWAYS KNOWN FOR ACADEMIC IMPARTIALITY.

WHILE ORIGINAL RESEARCH IS NOT THE ESSENCE OF A TRADE PUBLICATION, SELECT ARTICLES MAY BE BASED ON RESEARCH AND PROVIDE CITATIONS AND REFERENCES. ARTICLES ARE USUALLY WRITTEN BY PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD OR STAFF WRITERS WITH KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROFESSION. SIMILAR TO POPULAR PUBLICATIONS, AN EDITOR HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING THAT ARTICLES ARE WRITTEN CORRECTLY PRIOR TO PUBLICATION AND ASSUMES SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACCURACY, BUT THE ARTICLES ARE NOT NECESSARILY FACT-CHECKED.

ARTICLES FOUND IN TRADE PUBLICATIONS MAY BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR RESEARCH, BUT, AS WITH ANYTHING, YOU MAY NEED TO VERIFY QUESTIONABLE CLAIMS OR CONCLUSIONS.

TRADE PUBLICATIONS MAY USE SLEEK DESIGN, EXCITING IMAGES, AND ADVERTISING. THEIR WEBSITES MAY ALSO BE COLORFUL AND EYE-CATCHING. THE TRICK TO DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN A PROFESSIONAL AND POPULAR PUBLICATION IS TO ASK SOME SIMPLE QUESTIONS:


THE ADVERTISING IS A GOOD TIP-OFF IN A TRADE PUBLICATION, YOU'LL SEE ADS FOR CONFERENCES, SUPPLIERS, OR OTHER PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE PROFESSION. UNLESS YOU'RE READING A SHAVING INDUSTRY MAGAZINE, YOU PROBABLY WON'T SEE AN AD FOR SHAVING CREAM.

TRADE PUBLICATIONS ARE USUALLY RELEASED IN PRINT FORM ON A MONTHLY OR BIMONTHLY BASIS, BUT LIKE POPULAR MAGAZINES, THEIR ONLINE VERSIONS MAY BE UPDATED MORE FREQUENTLY.

OK, NOW HOW EXACTLY DOES THIS RIVET GET WORKED...?
LIKE OTHER TYPES OF PUBLICATIONS, ACADEMIC JOURNALS ARE A ABLE MEDIAN FOR RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF TOPICS IMPORTANT TO A PROFESSION OR ACADEMIC AREA. THESE JOURNALS PUBLISH SOME OF THE MOST CREDIBLE INFORMATION FOR A GIVEN FIELD. THE ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLE IS ONE OF THE PRIMARY WAYS THAT SCHOLARS COMMUNICATE THEIR RESEARCH.

NATURALLY, ACADEMIC JOURNALS ARE AIMED AT A VERY PARTICULAR AUDIENCE CONSISTING OF PROFESSIONAL ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS, AND EMPTIES TECHNICAL OR DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC JARGON. THE TITLE OF A JOURNAL USUALLY DESCRIBES ITS FOCUS AND OFTEN INCLUDES THE WORD "JOURNAL" TO MAKE SURE IT'S EASILY RECOGNIZED FOR WHAT IT IS. ARTICLE TITLES MAY BE INTENSELY SPECIFIC, JARGON-HAILED, AND LONG. ARTICLES THEMSELVES TEND TO BE LONG, TOO, AND MAY FEATURE CHARTS, GRAPHS, TABLES, AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS SUPPORTING THE ARTICLE. YOU WANT TO AVOID ANY FLUFF OR MEANINGLESS IMAGES IN A JOURNAL ARTICLE.

YOU WON'T FIND ANY SHARING CREAM MILK HERE, EITHER. IF THERE IS MILK, IT'S FOCUSED ON SOMETHING SPECIFIC TO THE JOURNAL'S DISCIPLINE. YOU MAY SEE NOTICES FOR CONFERENCES OR OTHER PUBLICATIONS, MAYBE EVEN SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT, TOOLS, OR RESOURCES USEFUL TO THE PROFESSION.

WHILE THERE ARE MANY, MANY, MANY ACADEMIC JOURNALS OUT THERE, YOU'LL PROBABLY SEE THEM ONLY IN YOUR LIBRARY OR A LIBRARY DATABASE. THEY CAN BE VERY EXPENSIVE AND HAVE A LIMITED REACH, SO YOU WON'T FIND THEM ON THE NEWSSTAND NEXT TO US WEEKLY.

TRADITIONALLY PRINTED VERSIONS OF ACADEMIC JOURNALS ARE STRAIGHTFORWARD, LACKING EMBELLISHMENT OR BRIGHT COLORS. YOU WON'T SEE A JOURNAL COVER FEATURING THE "WORLD'S HOTTEST NEW ISSUE." ANYWAY. WELL, ALL RIGHT, YOU MIGHT SEE THAT COVER, BUT "HOT" WON'T MEAN THAT YOU'RE THINKING.

STILL, THERE ARE MORE AND MORE "OPEN-ACCESS" ONLINE JOURNALS OFFERING FREE ACCESS TO ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLES FOR USERS, AS OPPOSED TO THE OFTEN EXPENSIVE ONLINE JOURNALS AND DATABASES. WHILE OPEN-ACCESS JOURNALS CAN OFFER HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH ARTICLES, SOME ARE NOT INDEXED, OR LISTED, IN TYPICAL LIBRARY DATABASES—BUT LIKE MOST THINGS, THAT'S CHANGING!

WHEN IN DOUBT, USE AN OUTSIDE RESOURCE LIKE THE DIRECTORY OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS IN ORDER TO SEARCH FOR CONTENT, AND, AS WITH ANY INFORMATION, DO YOUR BEST TO VERIFY THAT IT IS LEGITIMATE.

ACADEMIC JOURNALS, DEPENDING ON THE TITLE AND DISCIPLINE, ARE PUBLISHED MONTHLY, BIMONTHLY, QUARTERLY, ANNUALLY, OR EVEN ONLY ONCE EVERY FEW YEARS.

MOST OF THE TIME, JOURNALS HAVE A DESIGNATED VOLUME AND ISSUE NUMBER, EVEN IF THEY ARE ONLY PUBLISHED ONLINE. THE VOLUME NUMBER TYPICALLY REFERS TO THE WHOLE SET OF ISSUES PUBLISHED WITHIN A GIVEN TIME, USUALLY A YEAR, AND THE ISSUE NUMBER REFERS TO EACH INDIVIDUAL RELEASE.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF A JOURNAL IS PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY, THERE ARE A TOTAL OF SIX ISSUES EACH YEAR, THOSE SIX ISSUES ARE "CONTAINED" WITHIN ONE VOLUME.
The authors of journal articles are professional scholars and researchers who write to share their research or analyses, or to comment upon or review the research of others. The authors of academic articles are careful to cite their research and provide complete references so others can verify or attempt to duplicate their research.

Unlike articles in popular and trade publications, most academic journal articles go through a process called peer review. This process helps ensure accuracy and makes academic articles ideal sources for your own research.

When an article is peer-reviewed, the author of a paper sends it to the editor of a journal. That editor sends it out to other experts who are qualified to read, evaluate, and offer suggested changes in the article.

Editors seek other viewpoints so that they can determine whether there is a consensus of opinion on the paper. Often the names of the author(s) and/or of the reviewers are kept secret in order to prevent personal bias from affecting the reviewers’ work.

This is called a blind review. The process can take many months, and authors will likely be asked to submit multiple revisions that take into account the suggestions of the reviewers.

When a new volume starts, the page numbers start over. If a library subscribes to hard copies of a journal, they might bind all the issues in a volume together into one book-like collection, keeping the entire volume together and making it more easily located on the shelf.

Right now, you might be asking yourself, didn’t she say we were going to talk about databases? Yes, I did, and I apologize for taking the long way, but it’s necessary to explain peripherals before explaining databases.

So, compared to a database, your library holds very little.

We all know digital information is stored more effectively and efficiently than physical information. That’s why databases can hold far more journal, trade, newspaper, and magazine articles than your library, and you can easily search for, locate, and retrieve a whole bunch of articles very easily.*

*You’ll even find e-books and encyclopedias in databases, but well focus on finding articles, especially academic articles, for the time being.
Databases, like catalogs, are used to store and retrieve information. In fact, a catalog is a type of database, but we don't just call it one, because that would be confusing...more confusing.

The real difference between catalogs and databases is their purpose. Catalogs are most often used to locate information on items held or owned by the library. Library databases are used to locate information about articles or to locate digital versions of the articles themselves that the library doesn't necessarily "own." Databases can dig a little deeper than catalogs. You can use a catalog to find a journal, magazine, or newspaper. But you can't really "flip through" those titles and see the articles inside without actually walking to a shelf and picking up a copy of the journal. A database allows you to search within a specific title or across multiple titles. Thousands and thousands of titles can be searched with a single search, saving you an enormous amount of research time.

And even if you find an article that is not accessible through that database, you can try to find a hard copy of it in your library or request it from another library. When you're searching for articles, a database is the way to go.

Another difference between library catalogs and databases is there is usually only one catalog for a library, but it's likely that there will be many databases. Why? Well, there's a lot of academic journals out there aimed at very specific audiences. There are some very good general databases covering a lot of topics, but they might lack depth. On the other hand, there are subject-specific databases covering a narrow range of topics, but providing a lot of depth.

Remember: those discovery services that locate both physical and electronic information are especially useful when you want to do your research in all disciplines and find materials in all formats, such as books, journals, articles, dissertations, and unpublished works. The only problem is that you might be overwhelmed with results.

You might wonder why you can't just Google this stuff. One Google Scholar search is easier than multiple database searches, right?

Sorry, but the vast majority of academic journal articles aren't available through a Google Scholar search. A Google Scholar search can help you locate citations for a ton of articles, but most full-text articles will still be "locked" behind closed digital doors. Your library has access to databases because it pays for that access. Access doesn't grant ownership of the material (meaning access could disappear or be restricted), but it gets students and researchers the information they need most of the time.

Think of it this way: databases are like Fortresses, where the librarians are the guards. You punch in your search terms, and the librarians search through the databases to find the information you're looking for. If you have a question, you can ask the librarian! These databases can provide access to so many publications, that you can easily get lost searching through them. Your library might have access to over a hundred databases, each one covering a different topic!

Which type you choose depends on your research needs and your topic. When in doubt, ask a librarian! These databases can provide access to so many publications, that you can easily get lost searching through them. Your library might have access to over a hundred databases, each one covering a different topic!
ACADEMIC WORLD SEARCH PLUS

SEARCH MODE
- Boolean
- Of find all search terms

DATABASES ARE SIMILAR TO CATALOGS WHEN IT COMES TO HOW THEY'RE SEARCHED. WHEN YOU PLUG IN SEARCH TERMS, THE SYSTEM LOOKS THROUGH THE METADATA TO FIND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, JUST LIKE IN A CATALOG.

YOU CAN USE KEYWORDS OR DO AN ADVANCED SEARCH FOR TITLE, AUTHOR, OR SUBJECT. AMONG OTHER OPTIONS, YOU CAN ALSO USE BOOLEAN OPERATORS (AND, OR, NOT) BY INSERTING THEM INTO YOUR SEARCH OR BY USING THE DROP-DOWN OPTIONS.

WHEN YOU PERFORM A SEARCH, YOU'LL GET A LIST OF RESULTS, SIMILAR TO WHAT YOU FIND IN A CATALOG... BUT THE INFORMATION WILL LOOK A BIT DIFFERENT. YOU'LL PROBABLY SEE THE ARTICLE TITLE ALONG WITH THE JOURNAL TITLE, VOLUME, ISSUE, AND PAGE NUMBERS, AND MAYBE A LINK FOR THE "FULL TEXT" OF THE ARTICLE.

ALONGSIDE YOUR LISTED RESULTS, YOU'RE ALSO LIKELY TO BE GIVEN THE OPTION TO LIMIT OR "REFINE" YOUR SEARCH BY A VARIETY OF CRITERIA: "DATE," "RELATED SUBJECTS," "DOCUMENT TYPE" (ARTICLE, REVIEW, ESSAY, ETC.), AND "SOURCE TYPE" ARE ALL PRETTY COMMON.

TWO VERY IMPORTANT LIMITERS ARE THE "PEER-REVIEWED" LIMITER AND THE "FULL-TEXT" LIMITER. THE PEER-REVIEWED LIMITER (OR IT MIGHT SAY "SCHOLARLY," OR "ACADEMIC") WILL ELIMINATE A LOT OF THE RESULTS FROM YOUR LIST THAT DPRODUCTS GO THROUGH THE PEER-REVIEW PROCESS WE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER.

LIMITING YOUR SEARCH THIS WAY GETS BETTER, STRONGER RESULTS, AND IT'S LIKELY THAT YOUR INSTRUCTORS WILL REQUIRE YOU TO USE ONLY THIS TYPE OF ARTICLE.

ACADEMIC WORLD SEARCH PLUS

q comic books

"Article Title" Click Here for Full Text
Author Last Name, First Name. Journal Title volume #, issue # (Date) page range.
Subject: Comic books, strips, etc. / Motion pictures and comic books

"Article Title" Click Here for Full Text
Author Last Name, First Name. Journal Title volume #, issue # (Date) page range.
Subject: Comic books, strips, etc. / Horror comic books, strips, etc.

WE WON'T REVIEW ALL THOSE SEARCH METHODS SINCE WE COVERED THEM EARLIER, BUT I DO WANT TO HIGHLIGHT SOME ASPECTS UNIQUE TO DATABASE SEARCHES.

THE "FULL-TEXT" LIMITER IGNORES SEARCH RESULTS THAT DON'T PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE WHOLE ARTICLE.

OH, THAT'S WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR!

FROM THE OTHER END, YOU MAY NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE LATEST ISSUES OF A JOURNAL. EITHER, THIS IS CALLED AN EMBARGO PERIOD, SOME PUBLISHERS RESTRICT ACCESS TO THE MOST LATEST ONLINE ARTICLES, AND SOME LIBRARIES MIGHT NOT PAY FOR THE MOST RECENT MATERIAL. ASK YOUR LIBRARIAN HOW YOU CAN GET THE ARTICLE YOU NEED.

CAN I CHECK THIS JOURNAL OUT?

SOMETIMES THE WINDOW DEPENDS ON HOW FAR BACK THE JOURNAL HAS BEEN DIGITIZED OR TRANSCRIBED.

IF JOURNAL ISSUES FROM 1965 HAVE NOT BEEN ADDED TO THE DATABASE YET, THEN YOUR WINDOW OF ACCESS WILL SHRINK.

I'LL NEED A CREDIT CARD, TWO LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, AND A DNA SAMPLE.

SURE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO IMMEDIATELY ACCESS AND READ THE ARTICLES YOU FIND, BUT YOU'LL HAVE ELIMINATED A LOT OF ARTICLES THAT MAY BE RELEVANT AND VERY RECENT, BUT NOT IMMEDIATELY ACCESSIBLE.*

I RECOMMEND USING THE FULL-TEXT OPTION ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE TO, BECAUSE THERE IS ALMOST ALWAYS A WAY TO TRACK DOWN AN ARTICLE. YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIND IT IN ANOTHER DATABASE OR AS A HARD COPY IN YOUR LIBRARY. SO DON'T GIVE UP! YOU CAN ALSO REQUEST THE ARTICLE FROM ANOTHER LIBRARY VIA INTERLIBRARY LOAN. TAKE NOTE OF ARTICLES THAT SOUND INTERESTING AND TRACK THEM DOWN!

"IN A BIT, WE'LL TALK ABOUT ABSTRACTS, EXPLAINING HOW EVEN PARTIAL-TEXT RESULTS CAN BE REALLY USEFUL."
Back to the results list, if you click on the article title, you'll go into the record, where you'll get more information on the article, but still not the full text. You'll probably see the author(s), the name of the publication, the volume, issue, and page numbers, and some subject headings.

Remember, if you take that option and get another list, you can always go through the limiting process again and search within that narrower set of results, if needed.

If you decide the article is right for you, you can usually click on one that says something like full text or PDF. Often the full text is provided directly from the printed article, so there are all the images, tables, figures, and other visual aids from the article.

That basically explains how to perform a search within a database, again, be sure to use a database relevant to your topic, and use a precise, well-planned set of search terms or search statements. If you use the right combination of search skills and the appropriate database, you'll find some excellent resources.

But what if your instructor has given you a choice of articles that they want you to locate and read? Give them the citation, but that's it. New researchers get this kind of assignment all the time. What do you do?

One option is to search the catalog for the journal title and track down the right volume and issue on the shelf. Another option is to see if it can be found in one of the library's databases.

Since not every journal is included in every database, it's useful to know where specific journals are found.

Try looking in both general and subject-specific databases for the journal title. Most databases have links for searching through publication titles, then narrow your search to a specific volume, issue, and article. You can also try searching Google Scholar to find out which databases provide access to a particular journal.

Many libraries have a tool or their websites for searching for a specific journal title, both in physical and electronic format. These tools are great, you can search for a journal title and get a list of all the databases carrying that journal. If your library subscribes to those databases, you can just click a link to the journal, and start searching by volume, issue, and article.

If your library does have a discovery service, you may see an option on the library website labeled find articles, and more, or something similar. This simply allows you to plug in your search terms or article title, and multiple databases will be searched for content. This can be easy option, but it also may prove to be overwhelming if you're searching through a huge amount of information.
Official Website for the
JOURNAL of SUPERHERO
SCIENCE and CULTURE

NEW PODCAST
"Faster Than a Speeding...Sloth?"
The Relevance of Super-Slow
Heroes in a Fast-Paced World.

WINTER CONFERENCE
Don’t forget to register!

I.F YOU HAVE A CITATION YOU CAN'T LOCATE WITHIN A DATABASE, OR IF YOU FIND THAT YOUR LIBRARY DOESN'T HAVE FULL-TEXT ACCESS TO AN ARTICLE, YOU CAN REQUEST AN INTERLIBRARY LOAN. THIS IS THE PROCESS OF BORROWING AN ITEM FROM ANOTHER LIBRARY.

Often, these ILLS CAN BE INITIATED WITHIN A DATABASE. YOU MIGHT SEE A LINK THAT SAYS "ILL," "FIND FULL TEXT," "BORROW FROM ANOTHER LIBRARY," OR SOMETHING ALONG THOSE LINES. THESE CAN HELP YOU USE YOUR LIBRARY'S SYSTEM TO REQUEST A COPY OF THAT ARTICLE.

Even if you can't do this through the database, your library will probably have a request link on its website. Typically, these articles will be made available digitally, making the loan process very easy. You can also do this for books and other media, although physical items will have to be shipped to your library.

Here, take a load off.
When searching for articles, remember there are many databases and many ways to access a journal or an article. It's easy to get frustrated, so remember to speak with a librarian whenever you have a question or run into trouble. As I said, there's always a way to get the information you need. You just need the right approach.

We covered a lot of ground in this chapter, and you might be feeling a bit overwhelmed. Relax, it takes way more energy to explain this stuff than it does to just practice it yourself.

Once you have some experience with databases, you'll wonder how you ever got along without them!