

CREATING A SEARCH STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

When searching for regular information, we're used to just typing something into Google and getting quick results. When searching for scholarly information for your assignments though, the process is more complex and takes more time and effort.

It helps a lot if you have a plan before you start. A search strategy involves thinking about 3 things: what you need to search for, where you will search, and how you will search for it.

WHAT YOU NEED TO SEARCH FOR

First you need a topic. It's important to have a clear, focused topic to make your search easier. Often, it is hard to find sources on a general topic, but easier for a more specific one.

Try to make your topic as specific as possible. For example, instead of searching for difficulties finding a job, search for difficulties finding a job for new university graduates.

Sometimes you won't know enough about a topic to focus it well. If that's the case, do a quick search on your topic first. Look through the results to see what people write about and get ideas about what aspect of the topic you could focus on.

Once you have a clear topic, think about what types of information you need to find. This will really depend on the topic. Scholarly articles are common, but books are useful for broader topics and getting an overview, and are more common in some areas. You might need data and statistics, business information, or a primary source like a film or diary that you'll be analyzing.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Next you'll need to figure out where to search. For scholarly articles and books, the Omni library catalogue is a good starting point for many but not all topics. You can find the Omni search box in the middle of the library web page. Just type in your search.

More specialized search tools are better for some topics. You can find the best ones for your area by using the Library subject guides. Find them in the Research menu on any Library web page. Click on the subject area closest to your topic. You'll see a list of recommended specialized search tools for that area. At the bottom of the page you can also check to see if there is a search guide for your specific course, which is customized for your assignment.

If you're looking for statistics, news articles, or other types of sources, click on the Resources menu and choose More Research Materials to see search tools for those types of information.

HOW TO SEARCH

Once you know where to search, think for a bit about how you will search.

Before you start, it's helpful to think about search words. This will help make your search results better.

For example, if your topic is the difficulty of finding jobs for recent university graduates, your concepts will be difficulty, finding jobs, and new graduates.

Different people use different terms for the same concept, so think of other words people might use for your concepts. In our example, alternate words for difficulty might be problems or barriers, for finding jobs they could be job search or employment, and for university graduates one might be college graduates.

Once you have your concepts and alternate words, use them in your search. In many of the Library search tools, you put the alternate words for the same concept on one line separated with OR, and the different concepts on different lines separated by AND. You can find out more about using search words effectively in some of our other videos.

If you think about what, where, and how to search your searching will be much more successful.

QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.