

# Smarter Searching with Library Databases

## Session Transcript

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JUDE BENNETT: OK, so welcome everyone to this library session called Smarter Searching with Online Library Databases. My name's Jude Bennett. I'm one of the librarians here in Milton Keynes at the Open University Library and with me is my colleague Wendy Chalmers who'll be looking after the chat.

Just so that you know that the slides to the session and a handout are available. You can download them now from the page where you press Join Room. Or I'll be popping up some links at the end for you to download as well.

OK, so by the end of this session, you should be able to identify key search terms from your research topic and expand these using synonyms, understand how to use effective search techniques, such as Boolean searching, in building a search statement, and you should be able to understand the functionality offered by databases in filtering, saving, and exporting your results.

And as we go through the session, we'll be putting what you've learned into practise by building a search statement step by step. So the poll that you guys were filling in in the introduction-- in the introductory layout not many of you said you felt confident in searching library databases. So, hopefully, you'll feel more confident by the time you leave the session today.

It's important to understand what a database is and why you would use it when looking for information for your assignment rather than just relying on Library Search or just using Google. In an online library, a database is like an online catalogue, helping you to easily search, find, and access the right resource at the right time.

The OU Library buys almost all of its content through subscriptions to hundreds of different databases. As well as our e-books and journals, you can find databases of arts, music, and newspapers to use throughout your studies as well as some more subject specific databases. And most databases have some advanced search tools which allow you to filter your results in different ways, and that makes your searching really precise.

And in general, searching within a database returns fewer more relevant results than searching within Library Search, which is our discovery tool which you can find on the main page of the library website. It is worth noting, though, that Library Search itself is a sort of database. And you can use the techniques that you learn in this session to improve your searching there.

And we do have a separate training session about searching using Library Search, which you can attend live or catch up with a recording. However, it's really important to remember that Library Search doesn't search in every single database that the OU Library subscribes



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to. It doesn't connect well, for example, to our image, law, or newspaper databases. So for those instances, it's better to search directly in the databases.

So where can you find the OU databases? You can find links to all of the databases that the OU Library subscribes to on the library website itself. And I will show you this quickly now. So I'm going to share my screen with you.

And so this is the library home page. And the second tab along at the top here is called Library Resources, so if you click on there. As I said the OU Library obtains most of its resources through subscriptions to databases, which are all listed in an A to Z under the databases option here.

So, hopefully, it won't take too long to load today. The Wi-Fi has been a bit iffy. So, like I said, we've got a list of over 500 in alphabetical order. So if you know the name of the database you're looking for, whether it's something you've used before or your module website has told you to use it, you can find it here. Or you can search for the database within Library Search itself.

And they are also subdivided. So you've got the big long list of databases. But they're also listed here by type. So we've got specialist dictionaries. We've got e-book collections. We've got image and sound libraries, law cases, and newspapers.

So if I just click on that just to show you what we've got in the News Sources databases. There you go-- 19th century British Library newspapers, the Burney collection, Daily Mail archive, which is a new addition to our collections this year. So that's how you can find a more specialised database if you're looking for something.

We also have a section called Selected Resources For Your Study, which is at the top here. And this is where you can find selected specialist databases for a particular subject. And they are curated by librarians and academics together to create a subject specific collection to help you.

So if I go into Biological Sciences, you can see here that there is a database called Anatomy and Physiology online. And this contains interactive 3D images of the human body. And the images in this database are examples of content that would not be found through Library Search. So you would need to access the database directly, either using the A to Z or through this link, to see them and use them in your assignment.

Oh, I'm sorry. I've just come back to the slides. How is the sound now? is it all right? I'm sorry, I can't see the chat that comes through whilst I'm in screen sharing mode. So hopefully Wendy has been looking after you. OK, so if I move on.

So you can access over 500 databases through the OU Library. And if you don't know the exact name of the database that you're looking for, you can browse what's available, either



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by the type of content or by our curated subject collections. So I've got a couple of polls just to check that you've all been paying attention.

Library Search is a good place to search for newspaper articles. Do you think that's true or false? I'll give you two more seconds to pop your answer into there. 57% said false, and that is correct.

While Library Search does return some results for newspapers it doesn't connect well to all of the databases. So if you are looking for a particular article from a particular newspaper, it's best to go to that particular database. All right, and one more. seem

OK, why would you search a database rather than just using Library Search. So first answer, Library Search doesn't search all library databases. And databases can return fewer and more relevant search results.

OK, I think that everyone has voted. That was actually a trick question because they are both true. It doesn't search all the library databases and, depending on the database that you are looking in, it can return much fewer results that you can then sift through. So sorry, just a bit of a trick question for you there.

So now, we're going to start building a search statement for a research topic. We're going to start by extracting the keywords, using phrase searching, and then applying Boolean logic. So a topic that you need to find information for could be something you've been given for your EMA or your TMA, or simply a subject that you want to research further.

The topic that we're going to create a search statement for today is "discuss the impact of junk food advertising on the health and obesity rates of British primary school children." So from this topic, what keyword can you identify that we can use in our search? If you pop your ideas into the chat box. What keywords can you identify from this research topic that you think might help you in developing a search strategy?

Oh, they are, Leanne. What happened? They weren't meant to be underlined. There's obviously something-- well, that's cheating. Something's happened with the formatting of my PowerPoint. Yes, all the underlined.

[LAUGHTER]

I'll make sure that's fixed for the next session because that's just cheating. So yes, all the words are, indeed, highlighted and underlined. And if we start building a search statement using some or all of these words, your search should start returning some very relevant results.

So now that we've got our keywords, we can start to think about synonyms-- which I do find difficult to say, so if I do say cinnamon at one point, I do apologise-- which are words that



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mean exactly or nearly the same. For example, a synonym of hardworking could be industrious.

When building a search statement, it's important to think about synonyms as authors don't always use exactly the same terminology. And you can always use a thesaurus to help you find these alternative search terms. You could also think about alternative spellings if there are any for your keywords. For example, the British and American spellings of behaviour, and colour, and aluminium, for example.

So just in 30 seconds, can you think of any synonyms for our keywords? If you pop them into the chat, and let me know if anything that comes to mind. So if you think of an alternative for junk food. Yep, definitely, Leanne, fast food. Yeah, they're meant to be underlined at this point, Jane. Yes, definitely, overweight. Yes, elementary school, definitely.

So anything for advertising? Can we think of any alternatives for the word advertising? Yes, definitely. Yep, so you get the idea that if you just search for these particular keywords, you might be missing out on all these different words, and keywords, and topics that mean the same. But because they're not included in your search term, you might miss out on them.

Yeah, these are all brilliant ideas. Well done, guys. OK, so I think you came up with quite a few. These are just a couple that I came up with as I was putting the session together. I think we did mention a lot of them.

So for British, you can talk about United Kingdom and the nations. Junk food, fast food, I think someone mentioned there as well, and sweets if you want to go more specific. And alternative for children, young people, possibly, if you're not looking at children specifically.

OK, so now that we've got our keywords and synonyms, we can start looking at how to put these together using search techniques, such as phrase searching and, that word, Boolean logic, again. We will also look at how to use the field search and filters within a database to limit our results.

One of the most powerful search techniques is called phrase searching, which involves putting together two or more words which commonly appear together in inverted commas. And the search tool will, then, only look for instances where these words appear together in that order, for example, "United Kingdom" or "higher education."

Using one of the our keyword search terms as an example, by popping just the words junk food like this into the Science Direct database brought back 9,247 results. But by placing the words in inverted commas like this and searching again that reduced the number of results down to just over 3,000, which is, obviously, still far too many if you are doing a subject search. But it shows you how effective phrase searching can be at reducing your results and excluding irrelevant results.



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And when searching within a database, if we don't specify where to search, the database will find our search terms wherever they occur within the record that's held within the database. So all the articles and reviews in a database are held with a record with things like author, article title, all stored in fields. And the database will search all of those fields unless we specify where to look.

So we can make the database search just a particular part of the record, and this is called field searching. In the database, Academic Search Complete, searching for the phrase "junk food" in inverted commas in the different fields, can really make a difference to how many results I get as you can see from the numbers that are on the slide now.

So as we saw earlier, searching for a single phrase is likely to bring back a huge number of results. So to reduce these, we can combine our keywords using a technique called Boolean searching. This is where you can combine keywords with AND, OR, or NOT to reduce or increase the number of search results. This is a way of getting fewer results by excluding certain search terms or expanding the results by using synonyms.

And just as an aside, search engines like Google automatically do put AND between your search terms. And so if you're searching for local pub, it will automatically look for local pubs if that's what you are searching for in your spare time. So using an example pair of terms from our keywords and synonyms, health and fitness, putting an AND between the search terms will return fewer results, as it will only return results that contain both of those terms.

Putting an OR between the search terms, so health OR fitness, will return more results as the results will contain either or both terms. And putting a NOT between the search terms will return far fewer results. In this example, only those results that contain the word health. However, remember that by using NOT, you will also not retrieve documents that compare the two. So do use NOT with caution.

So I'm just keeping an eye to make sure that Wendy is all right. Yep, she's answering all your questions. OK, so one last technique before we can begin building our search statement is to mention truncation. This is a searching technique in which a word ending is replaced by a symbol, which is normally an asterisk, which is the little star. On most keyboards it's when you press Shift and 8.

And using truncation instructs the database to search for different forms of the same word and can expand your search results. And just to show you what I mean by that, an example, of this using one of our keywords, advertising. Truncating this to advert with the asterisk instructs the database to search for anything beginning with the letters A-D-V-E-R-T. So it will search for anything like advertising or advertisement.

So one last thing for you to think about. So what words do you think the database might search for if we were to truncate another one of our keywords like this, so child with a little asterisk. Yep, so children was one of our search words, childless, yep, brilliant, childish,



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childhood. In this instance, Grant, it wouldn't search adolescence because that doesn't start with the letters C-H-I-L-D. You'd use that as a synonym.

OK, so you guys have definitely got the idea of how you can expand your search really simply using the truncation technique. OK, so now we can put all of the different elements together to build a search statement that we can then go and put it into a database. You can see here examples of phrase searching, so junk food and primary school. Truncation-- so I truncated advert, obes, so that would bring back obesity or just obese.

And lots of Boolean operators, and this is a really specific search statement. So it should hopefully bring back a manageable number of pretty relevant results. And you'll notice I've put some brackets there. Brackets are used to group together words that represent one concept. So, for example, health and obes or obesity so you group synonyms, sorry, together using brackets if you want to search for one or the other.

So now that we have our search statement, we're ready to head into a database and try it out. But just before we do, just to mention what functions within a database can be used to limit and manage your search results. You can limit your results using filters. You can print or download your results. And you can export your results to your reference management tool. And I will be showing you all of this using the database Academic Search Complete.

These functions do look a bit different depending on which database you are in. But it's handy to know that they are usually there and where you can usually find them. So we're going to go into Academic Search Complete because this is a multidisciplinary database. And it has a really clear search interface for me to show you guys how it works.

And you can find this in the database A to Z on the library website. But I'm going to cheat, and I have a link all ready. So I'm just going to share my screen with you guys again. There we go. Oh, yes, I did have it open already, so, hopefully, this will still be working for me.

So I also cheated earlier, and I had the search statement ready for me to copy in. So I'm literally just going to the search statement that I displayed on the previous slide, paste that in there, and press Search. And hopefully it won't be too slow. Oh, it is going to be too slow. Bear with me just one second.

I think possibly it's because I logged into the database before the session. It's logged me back out again. There we go. So I'm just going to grab the search statement again, pop it into the search box, and press Search. So, hopefully, this should show-- yes.

So as you can see, the database holds thousands, and thousands, and thousands, and thousands of journals. And by creating a search statement that's really specific about the topic that we are looking for, it has returned 99 results which isn't too bad. But we can make that better because we're only interested in things that we can read the full text of.



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So I can limit this on the left-hand side only to results that will give me the full text. And you're normally only looking for peer-reviewed journal articles. So I'm going to limit it to that as well. And I'm also only really interested in recent research. So I'm going to limit the date to the last 10 years. And you can do this using the slider, but I just prefer to type it in, and press Enter.

And you can see that's taken us down to 15 results, which you could then go through. And some of these look like that could be really, really useful for the topic that we are researching. If you wanted to reduce it even further, we can look into field searching. And on Academic Search Complete, it's here, Selecting a Field.

If I change that to, rather than just looking everywhere, changing to Looking in Abstract, and press Search. You can see we've now got seven results, which is a very, very manageable number of results. And there should be at least two or three that will be useful. I'm just going to keep an eye on the chat here as well.

I'm sorry that people keep losing the sound. OK, sorry about that. I was just double checking. I was just reading through the chat to make sure that everyone was OK. So if you do have a search results list, what you can do as you go through is collect these into folders.

And in Academic Search Complete, you've got a little icon here on the right. And you can-- if you've got these seven results here, and you only want to look at five, say, you can collect them into a folder like this, go to folder view, and they are here.

And you can access the PDF of the full text by going into it here. And you can download and print from here. And you can also export a RIS file if you are using bibliographic management tool like EndNote.

OK, I'm really sorry that some of you are having sound problems when I go into screen share. I don't know whether that's an internet connection thing, but I am really sorry. It looks like it's fairly intermittent. So if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

OK, so now, it's your turn. We've got five minutes. And it's time for you to have a go. Don't worry - for this you don't need to know anything about the subject to complete this exercise. It's just an example to get you thinking about how to extract keywords from a topic and how to combine them into a search statement.

So we haven't quite got five minutes. So if I say, three minutes until 13:27. And there are reminders about what we've covered in the session on this slide. When you've got your search statement ready, let me know how you get on. If you've got any questions, obviously, pop them in the chat and let us know as you are going through.

And if you did want to give it a go in a database, I'm just going to pop the link to the Academic Search Complete database. I've just popped that in the chat if you wanted to go in



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there. So yes, have a go, and tell me what you think. And I'll look at the chat as well and help Wendy out with some of the questions that are coming through.

So if you start thinking about, from this research topic, what keywords do you think you'd want to use? Are there any synonyms that you'd want to put in? Yep, Sam, that looks good. Are there any that you'd want to make into a phrase search? How would you combine things using Boolean logic?

Any words that you think-- either your keywords or some of your synonyms, that would work well with truncation? And think about how you'd combine them, so is there anything that you definitely want to exclude, bearing in mind that you should use NOT with caution. Anything that you think you'd want an either/or.

Jane, yeah, that looks really good. Have a think about whether you'd-- how you then develop that. So there are your keywords. So start having a think about how you'd want to develop that using the techniques that we've discussed today. I'm so sorry, Ingrid, if you had trouble seeing that or hearing that.

I'm sorry. I can't see the messages that come into chat when I'm doing the screen share. So I'm really sorry about that. How is everyone getting on with their search statement? Does anyone-- oh, Leanne, oh, that looks really good. Benefits or advantages, yep, definitely, I think that would work really well, Leanne. Well done, yes.

Grant, yeah, looking good. I'd probably pop an AND in between therapy and learning difficulties, just to make sure that it knows that you want to include everything. Yep, really good, you guys have really got the idea of this. So hopefully, you feel a bit more confident.

I think the only difference I had was when I was making an example of this, I truncated disability to "disabilit" asterisk. And that should bring back some really good ones, excellent.

So we're coming to the end of the session, and you should now be able to identify key search terms from your research topic and expand these using synonyms. You guys did really well at that. Use effective search techniques, such as Boolean searching, in building a search statement, which you guys have also been able to do really well. And understand the functionality offered by databases in filtering, saving, and exporting your results.

So I do say, you can't break databases, so go and have a play, and see what you can find and what you can save. So hopefully, you now feel confident enough to begin building your search statements and searching for information in the library databases. But you aren't alone. The library helpdesk is there to help whenever you need us. And our contact details are available on every page of the library website.

The phones are manned 9:00 to 5:00 Monday to Friday, or you can send us an email. And we also have a webchat service which is available 24/7. And finally, these slides are



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available to download, along with a handout which summarises everything that we've talked about in today's session.

And I'm just going to pop up a link pod so you can download the handouts and the slides from here as well as there's a link to the library website. And that's the end of the session.



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