



How to find articles

The Libraries subscribe to different databases that enable you to identify and access articles published in journals, magazines and newspapers on a specific topic or by a particular author. Most of these articles are not freely available on the Web and cannot be found using search engines such as Google. You may access the databases from library computers or from home where you will login with your Concordia ID Card barcode number and Library PIN.

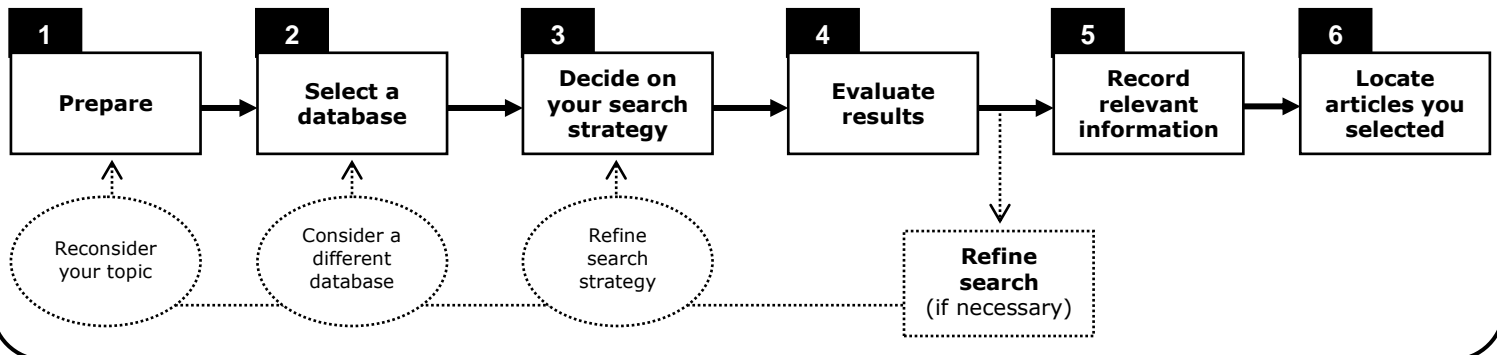
If you are looking for a specific article for which you already have a citation or reference, go to step 6.

Databases:

- Give you access to a wider selection of quality articles published on your topic than you could find on the Web
- Enable you to limit your search to scholarly or “peer-reviewed” articles (which is often required for assignments)
- Provide a sophisticated search system (to help you formulate your search more precisely than you would be able to do using Google)

Finding articles with useful information is a process!

Although this handout presents a few basic steps that you may follow, keep in mind that research does not always evolve in a straight line. Often the information you find will bring new thoughts and ideas that will make you rethink your initial approach.



I. Prepare

Think about your topic:

Scholarly articles usually focus on a very specific aspect of a topic. This makes it hard to write an assignment based on the information found in articles only. Before you begin looking for articles, consult an encyclopedia, a handbook, your textbook or another book until you have a general understanding of your topic and the key concepts surrounding it. Think about the types of articles you need and where the most likely sources might be. Ask yourself:

- Who would you expect to be writing about the topic? Where would you expect relevant articles on your topic to be published? In newspapers? Magazines? Academic journals in a particular discipline?
- How current do the articles need to be?
- Do you just need a few articles or do you need to be very thorough?

1. Prepare, continued...

Once you have considered these questions, you are ready to look for the databases that might meet your needs. Some databases:

- Are multidisciplinary and index major journals from all subject areas - often a good starting point. An example of a multidisciplinary database is Academic Search Premier.
- Attempt to be as comprehensive as possible for one subject area. For example, PsycINFO attempts to cover the world's literature in psychology.
- Index scholarly journals while others index an entire range of publications. Most databases that index both academic and non-academic publications have a feature that allows you to limit your search to one type or the other.
- Are updated daily, others monthly, quarterly or even less often. When choosing a database, be sure to check the time period covered and the frequency of updates.

2. Select a database

Sometimes your topic will be well covered in one database. However, no single database includes everything on a topic, so be prepared to search through several.

Starting points:

- Browse the list of databases using the Concordia Libraries Database Finder (<http://library.concordia.ca/research/databases/>).
- Consult the Research Guides by Subject section of the Libraries' Web site (<http://library.concordia.ca/research/subjects/>).
- Read the description of each database (click on the "more info" link located next to each entry within the Concordia Libraries Database Finder). The description identifies subject areas included, types of publications indexed and date covered.
- Ask for assistance. Reference librarians can help you choose appropriate databases for your topic. Consult with them in person, or via the Libraries' online Ask a Librarian service (<http://library.concordia.ca/help/questions/>).

3. Decide on your search strategy

- Identify the key concepts of your topic.
- For each concept, think of keywords and synonyms.
- You may want to consider using standardized terms (often referred to as "subject headings" or "descriptors" in databases). In many databases, articles are assigned a standardized term and once you find the correct term, you will be able to quickly find many articles on your topic.

This may be helpful when searching for a concept that can be expressed in more than one way. For example, to help you find information on all kinds of "beauty products" such as cosmetics, deodorants, sunscreens, toothpastes, the business database ABI/INFORM uses the phrase "health & beauty aids".

To find a list of standard subject terms used in a database, look for the thesaurus or subject terms feature.

- Think about how you will combine your search terms in a way the database will understand. For example, to find articles about violence on television, in most databases, you need to combine your keywords using AND or OR

violence AND television

When you use AND between two keywords the articles retrieved must contain both words.

violence AND (television OR media)

When you use OR between two keywords the articles retrieved must contain at least one of the words. When using AND and OR in one search statement, always use parentheses to group synonyms.

4. Evaluate results

Read the summaries (or abstracts) of the articles your search retrieved. Take time to critically analyze and evaluate those you are planning to use to see how well each contributes to the aims of your research assignment. When you browse your results, pay attention to the vocabulary used in the subject heading or descriptor fields; these will provide you with alternative or additional terms to use should you need to focus or expand your search.

Refine your search strategy

- Did you retrieve too many articles?
 - You may need to focus your search by adding another concept (keyword):
For example, instead of violence AND television use violence AND television AND children
 - You may need to search within specific segments of the database, such as SUBJECT HEADINGS or COMPANY NAME, as opposed to using the default search setup, which is usually by keyword
 - Check the limit features of the database; perhaps you need to limit your results by date of publication, language or type of publication
- Did you retrieve only a few articles?
 - You may need to broaden it by using more words to describe one concept:
For example, (violen* OR rage OR “abusive behaviour” OR battering) AND television
 - Note that the truncation symbol (most often an asterisk *) retrieves variants of the same word:
For example, use violen* instead of violent OR violence

Consider a different database

- You may find that, although you used the right words, the articles retrieved are not appropriate to your research. For example, instead of retrieving articles that discuss the social aspects of TV violence on children, you retrieved articles on how TV violence can affect the consumer behaviour of children. Before adding additional concepts to refine your search, verify that the database you selected is appropriate for your subject area.

Reconsider your topic

- Sometimes, there just is not enough information on your topic and you may want to consider changing it. Before you do so, consult with a reference librarian. A librarian may help you develop a different strategy for your research.

5. Record relevant information

Most databases have a feature that allows you to select articles you consider important. Look for a “mark” or “add” to folder feature. You can usually print, e-mail or save your list and/or the articles themselves.

If you just want to write down what you need to locate a specific article in the library, you will need to record the title of the journal, volume, issue, date and page number where your article is published. It is advisable to record the name of the author and the title of the article as well.

RefWorks

- RefWorks is an online bibliographic tool that can be used to store, organize and manage citations or references that you find in CLUES and in many article databases.
- When using databases, you can save your results and export them to a personal RefWorks account that you create.
- Save time and avoid frustration by using RefWorks to prepare bibliographies for your assignments according to a variety of citation styles such as APA, MLA, Chicago and many more
- Learn more about RefWorks at <http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/refworks.php>

6. Locate articles you selected

Does the library have the article you need? Is it available online?

In many databases, you will be able to view the complete text of an article by following the link that appears together with the citation. The link may be marked as “PDF full text” or “HTML full text”.

When there are no direct links to the complete article in the database, look for the “Find it! @ Concordia” button, which can save you a lot of time. “Find it! @ Concordia” will try to locate an electronic copy of the article you are looking for.

However, if you do not find a match for your article, you need to check CLUES, the library catalogue, to determine if the Libraries have the particular volume and issue of the journal in which the article is published (either in electronic or in print format).

For example, you have the following citation:

Nogué, J., & Villanova, J. L. (2002). Spanish colonialism in Morocco and the Sociedad Geografica de Madrid, 1876-1956. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28(1), 1-20.

When you choose the Journal Title search tab in CLUES, two options are available:

- The first search box allows you to search all the journals in CLUES, regardless of their format (print, electronic, microform). If the journal is in electronic format, there will be a link to it but the years available will not be indicated.
- The second search box allows you to search a more detailed database of the e-journals to which Concordia subscribes. This database is more complete than CLUES (for e-journals) in that it has years of coverage and is updated more frequently.
- Searching both options is recommended.

What if the article is not available at Concordia?

- Try searching Google by using the significant words or a phrase from the title of the article combined with the last name of the author. You may also try searching for the title of the journal using quotations. This will often lead to the publisher’s Web site. Browse the site to see if the article you need is freely available. Some publishers allow access to older articles without subscription.
- You can also submit an interlibrary loan request using COLOMBO (<http://library.concordia.ca/services/ill/>).
- If you prefer to go to another library that has a printed version of your article to photocopy it yourself, a list of local libraries with links to their catalogues is available on the Libraries’ Web site.

For more information, contact us - <http://library.concordia.ca/help/questions/>