Best practice for literature searching

|  |
| --- |
| UTS: LiBRARY |

**Stages of your search**

**What is a literature search?**

A systematic and comprehensive method of finding relevant literature on your topic.

**Why?**

* Review existing theories and evidence
* Identify key authors and publications
* Identify current research / trends on your topic
* Help you to broaden or narrow your topic
* Identify research methodologies and models

**How?**

1. **Background reading and preparation**  
     
   **Purpose**: get an overview of your topic, a sense of terminology used, key authors or texts, find out what’s already been explored in this area.  
    **Methods**:

* Google it!
* Google Scholar it!
* Use multidisciplinary databases to do a basic search like:  
  *ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, Scopus, Web of Science*
* Use subject dictionaries and encyclopedias

1. **Scope your topic**  
     
   **Purpose**: narrow / broaden your topic to fit the purpose of your literature search, identify what you need to find  
     
   **Methods**:
   * Break your topic down into key concepts
   * Identify related concepts and words
   * Identify inclusion or exclusion criteria (e.g dates, geography, theories, methods, population)
   * Identify literature types needed (e.g statistics, government data, multimedia, primary resources)
2. **Identify search tools**  
     
   **Purpose**: identify where you might find the literature needed  
     
   **Methods**:
   * Use the Find Databases tool
   * Use the Library’s Study Guides
   * Identify relevant web sites or related sites (e.g. government web sites, university repositories)
3. **Search**  
     
   **Purpose**: take what you brainstormed in Step 2 to create a search strategy and then try it in your search tools from Step 3  
     
   **Methods**:
   1. Identify keywords
   2. Identify any exact phrases that may apply (e.g. “sustainable development”)
   3. Identify if you need truncation or wildcards (e.g sustainab\* to find sustainable, sustainability)
   4. Combine your keywords using Boolean operators (AND OR NOT)
   5. Put your words together to run a search (e.g. “sustainable development” AND econom\*)
4. **Evaluate & Revise**  
     
   **Purpose**: see if your search strategy brought back relevant results, and also revise your search as needed to improve it  
     
   **Methods**:
   * Browse titles and abstracts
   * Revise your search strategy as needed (e.g. broaden / narrow, add exclusions)
   * Evaluate if you need to revise the list of search tools
5. **Manage your results**  
     
   **Purpose**: keep track of your search strategy and results so you can easily replicate further down the track  
     
   **Methods**:
   * Use referencing software (e.g. EndNote, Refworks, Mendeley)
   * Use a document to divide your results up (e.g. theory, methodology, results)
   * Set up search alerts (e.g. Google Scholar alerts, database alerts, journal table of content alerts)