OCEA 1001 Assignment Research / Database Search Tips

Check out the OCEA 1001 online library guide at: https://dal.ca.libguides.com/ocean/ocea1001 or go to: http://libraries.dal.ca/ > Subject Guides > OCEA 1001

The OCEA 1001 guide provides tips & videos that will help you to plan and do your research. It also lists a number of databases that will allow you to find scientific research and review articles.

Many databases allow you to use the following words to connect search terms. This strategy helps to make your search more efficient.

**AND**
- Narrows a search
  - e.g. dioxin and fish

**OR**
- Broadens a search
  - Allows you to use synonyms
    - e.g. marine or ocean or sea

**NOT**
- Allows you to exclude certain types of information
  - e.g. pollution not air

*Parentheses = (  )*
- Allows you to specify the order of the search
  - e.g. (solar or sun) and (energy or heat)
- Terms within parentheses are searched first

*Truncation = *
- When you use an asterisk to truncate the word, it directs the database to search for variations in spelling or word termination.
  - e.g. environment* (retrieves environment, environmental, environmentalism, etc)
- Databases can vary in the symbol they use to truncate words. Sometimes the search interface will give an indication of the truncation symbol that you should use. Otherwise check the database’s Help feature to confirm which symbol works for a specific database.

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER...**
By the time you begin to search the databases, you should have identified a fairly specific topic. If you search the scientific journal literature for a broad topic such as marine pollution, you will retrieve a large number of citations. Try to narrow your search so that you retrieve a manageable number of citations (up to 50 results is usually reasonable).

**DEFINE THE TOPIC**
- e.g. I need to find journal articles on sources of marine pollution in the Atlantic Ocean.

**IDENTIFY THE MAIN CONCEPTS**
- e.g. marine pollution Atlantic Ocean
LIST THE TERMS

List all the terms you can think of which may be used to refer to the concepts. These can include synonyms, variant spellings or alternate terms.

e.g. marine pollution Atlantic
     ocean debris
     sea

CREATE A SEARCH STATEMENT

Decide how to combine the terms into a search statement.

   e.g. (marine or ocean* or sea) AND (pollut* or debris) AND Atlantic

Type the search statement into the database search box(es) and click on the “search” button. When the results appear, select a relevant article title and read the abstract to get a better idea of the article’s content. Then click on the “Find a Copy”, “Get it at Dal”, Fulltext, or pdf link to access the article. Once you have retrieved a number of articles that interest you, you can print, download, or in some cases, e-mail the articles to yourself. If the journal is not available online, check the Novanet online catalogue (aleph1.novanet.ns.ca/F) to see if the library has the print format of the journal title, and confirm that the volume and issue that you require are in the library.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

During a database search, if you retrieve too many results, try narrowing the search. On the other hand, if you retrieve too few or no results, try broadening the search.

In order to Narrow a Search (if too many hits):
   • Use AND to add another search word
   • Use NOT
   • Use terms that are more specific
   • Use a narrower range of publication dates

In order to Broaden a Search (if too few hits):
   • Use OR (with synonyms)
   • Use terms that are more general
   • Use truncation
   • Use a broader range of publication dates

Other Suggestions:
   • Be sure that you are using the correct terminology for the topic.
   • Check that the search words are spelled correctly.
   • Confirm that you are using an appropriate database.

Ask a Human Search Engine for Help!

The librarians in the campus libraries can help you to improve your search skills and find the information that you require. If you need further assistance, please drop by to see us at the ground floor Service Point in the Killam Library, or contact me:

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