

Focusing Research Questions, Beginning the Literature Review

Primary Database for Scholarly Publications in Sociology

SocINDEX. 1895-present (only selected core journals are indexed as far back as 1895).

A major database for sociology and related disciplines; indexes articles in ~5,700 journals (most, though not all, are peer-reviewed); also provides abstracts of books, book chapters, dissertations, and conference papers. Full text is included for nearly 900 journals and 17,000 conference papers.

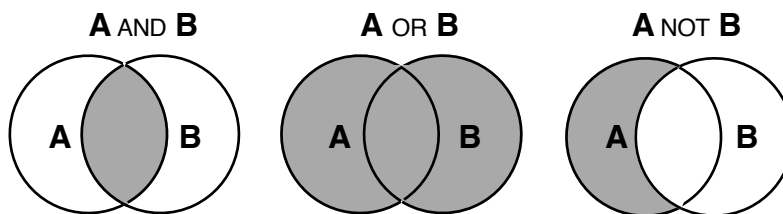
SocINDEX offers comprehensive coverage of sociology, encompassing all sub-disciplines and closely related areas of study. These include criminology & criminal justice, demography, ethnic & racial studies, gender studies, marriage & family, sociology of medicine & health, political sociology, religion, rural & urban sociology, social development, social psychology, social structure, social work, cultural anthropology, sociological theory, substance abuse & other addictions, and violence.

Basic Concepts for Searching Databases

Concept	Explanation	Example
Phrase search (quotes required)	search for an exact phrase (most, but not all, databases use quotation marks)	“death penalty” “standardized test” “reality TV”
Boolean logic (for keyword searching)	use Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) for more precise searching	[see following examples]
AND	search for records that have <i>all</i> of the words (narrows the search)	race and poverty drug use and educational attainment
OR	search for records that have <i>any</i> of the words (broadens the search)	homosexual or gay or lesbian or queer china or japan or korea
NOT	<i>exclude</i> records that have the word (narrows the search)	advertising not (TV or television)
Truncation	search for root word with any ending (most, but not all, databases use an asterisk [*])	adolescen* [finds adolescent, adolescents, adolescence]

Examples are from SocINDEX using EBSCO's database search engine

Visual representation of how Boolean searching works (Venn diagrams)



Additional Techniques for Searching Databases

Concept	Definition	Example
Complex Boolean search	[place search words that belong together in the same search box (or in parentheses)]	(spous* or wife or wives or husband*) and (abus* or batter* or violen*)
Proximity	require words to appear within a certain distance of each other n (for “near”) = words can appear in any order w (for “within”) = words must appear in specified order	asian* n4 american* african w2 american* (n# and w# indicate the maximum number of intervening words) note: if no quotes or proximity connectors or are used, Ebsco defaults to w5
Field qualification (field limiting)	require words to appear in a certain field in the database record (easy way is to use drop-down menus)	au coleman (for author field) ti racial profiling (for title field)
Limit (filter)	restrict search results to a subset of the database	e.g., by language, year of publication, type of publication
Add to folder (Mark, Save, Store, etc.)	select or save records from search results for future action	save specified records to display, print, email, or add to bibliographic manager (e.g., RefWorks) later

Examples are from SocINDEX using EBSCO’s EBSCOhost search platform

Ways to Focus a Search

 **If your search retrieves too many items, try narrowing your search:**

- add an additional concept to your search query
for example, “gender and discrimination and income” instead of “gender and discrimination”
- try phrase searching rather than connecting search terms with “and”
for example, “educational attainment” instead of “education” and “attainment”
- use proximity operators to require your search terms to be near one another
for example, “urban n5 japan” instead of “urban and japan”
- restrict some of your search terms to specific parts of the record (i.e., “field qualification”)
for example, search for the word in the title only, instead of anywhere in the record
- use subject terms (controlled vocabulary indexing terminology) to find records that have been assigned specific subject terms by an indexer (i.e., a person!), rather than searching all fields
for example, “drug abuse” as a subject term, rather than as a general keyword search
- narrow your topic to a specific geographical area (e.g., country, region, state, city)
- apply limits or filters to your search results to make them more manageable, for example:
only items published after 2003
only English-language articles
only items of a certain publication format (e.g., academic journals)
- research a particular angle or aspect of the topic that interests you (e.g., historical, sociological, psychological, ethical, political, religious)

- choose a research database that is narrower in scope
for example, a database that indexes only sociology journals instead of journals from many different disciplines

🗨️ If your search doesn't retrieve enough items, try broadening your search statement:

- do the opposite of the suggestions listed above for narrowing search results, for example:
eliminate a concept from your search query
expand your topic to include broader/additional geographical areas
- truncate important words to retrieve more items, for example: "immigra*" instead of "immigration" or "immigrants"
- find additional terms and synonyms: browse a list of search results, locate a record that is a close match to your topic, and closely examine words used in the title, abstract, and subject headings
for example, if you searched for "teenagers," but a close match uses the word "adolescents," try a new search using "teenager* or adolescen*"
- scan the bibliography or list of references of an article that closely matches your topic
- search for additional articles by the author(s) of an article that closely matches your topic
- think more broadly, drawing in additional concepts, ideas, and issues, related to your topic;
incorporate these into your search strategy
- try your search in other databases that may be more relevant to your topic, or that may index a larger or broader range of journals; ask your professor or a librarian for suggestions

🗨️ A "Find more like this" or similar option may be available to identify "on target" articles

Exercise for narrowing results using a series of progressively focused searches

1. Click "New Search" (upper left corner) to start over
2. In Box 1, type: drugs and in Box 2 type: crime and click "Search"
3. Change drop-down menu for Box 1 from "Select a Field (optional)" to "SU Subject Terms" and click "Search"
4. Do the same thing for Box 2 and click "Search"
5. Refine results by choosing "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals"
6. Refine results again by choosing "Publication Date" 2004-2014
7. Under Refine Results / Limit To, click "Show More;" under Language, select English
8. Focus results by adding a new concept. In Box 3 type: teen* or youth* or adolescen* (truncate terms!)
9. Click "Search History" to review prior searches (click again to close search history)
10. Try another limiting tactic: for "crime," change drop down menu from "SU Subject Terms" to "TI Title"

Other Databases Recommended for Sociology Topics

Academic Search Complete

Indexes articles from ~13,600 academic periodicals in all disciplines; over 80% of the journals indexed are peer-reviewed; ~ 67% include full text

Depending on your topic, the following databases may also prove useful. If you need assistance using these or other library resources, ask at the Research Desk in Mudd.

Alcohol Studies Database (Google title to find)
Anthropology Plus
ATLA Religion Database
Black Studies Center
Communication & Mass Media Complete
Criminal Justice Abstracts
EconLit
Education Research Complete
Environment Complete
ERIC (education)
Ethnic NewsWatch (ethnic/minority/native magazines, newspapers, etc.)
Gender Studies Database
iPoll Databank (Roper Center for Public Opinion Research)

Legal Collection
LegalTrac
LGBT Life (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender)
MEDLINE
NCJRS Abstracts Database (criminal justice)
PAIS International (public policy)
Physical Education Index (sports, fitness, physical education, dance)
PsycINFO (psychology)
Social Sciences Citation Index
SPORTDiscus (sports, fitness, athletics)
Women's Studies International
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts

Tips for finding research articles

- Limit results to academic, scholarly, or peer reviewed journals; though limiting provides a preliminary filter, not all articles in a scholarly journal are scholarly or research (such as letters to the editor, editorials, reviews, commentaries, etc.), so you need to evaluate each article individually
- Research articles generally include:
 - summary or abstract
 - hypothesis, question, or assumption to be tested
 - literature review
 - methodology section with description of subjects, procedures, and tools used
 - findings/results section, with analysis of results, significance, and/or explanation of conclusions
 - suggestions for further research
- Look for a statistical data and analysis section in the paper, and words like data, analysis, qualitative, quantitative, study, measure, subjects, cohort, etc.
- Look for words that describe specific research methods: survey, interview, focus group, case study, ethnography, textual analysis, content analysis, longitudinal study, participant observation, etc.

Quick Group Exercise

Interdisciplinary thinking: In addition to SocINDEX, which database(s) would you recommend for each topic suggested?

- Use above list, or use the “by subject” option of the library’s database list to browse
- Consult brief descriptions of potential database to confirm appropriateness of each database

One-Minute Response Card

Side 1: Something new, useful, helpful, etc. that you learned about research today.

Side 2: Something you didn’t understand, is still confusing, you’d like to learn more about, or remains unanswered from today’s session.

OR

How this session could be improved.

Coming up: Optional RefWorks workshops! Sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/rwwkshp>