

## Searching for Articles in Library Databases: Research Tips & Strategies

Basic Search	Advanced Search	More Search Strategies
--------------	-----------------	------------------------

Constructing a good search can save you a lot of time and effort. By creating better searches, you can eliminate many irrelevant hits. The following search tips and strategies can successfully help you find what you are looking for.

### Basic Search

Most library magazine, journal, and newspaper databases work in the same way. There is a search box in which to place search words and then you simply click on the search button. There are a few other tips you should know to get the best results. Look at the following example:

The image shows a search interface with several callout boxes explaining search tips:

- Truncation:** Use the asterisk (\*) to find all forms of a word. For example, smok\* will find smoke, smokes, smoking, smoker and smokers.
- AND:** Combine search words with AND.
- Date Range:** Select a date range to find more recent articles or articles from a certain time period.
- Limiters:** To find articles that contain only the full text of an article and articles from scholarly or peer-reviewed journals, check these boxes when available.

The search interface includes a search box containing "smok\* and women and effects", a "Search" button, a "Clear" button, a "Database:" dropdown menu, a "Date range:" dropdown menu set to "All dates", and a "Limit results to:" section with two checked options: "Full text documents only" and "Scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed".

## Advanced Search

Most library databases will have an advanced search option that allows you to search for terms found in either the title, subject, author, publication name or other portion of the article. This type of searching is more efficient in that the words being searched have to be found in one of those areas or fields in order to come up in the results list.

The screenshot shows an advanced search interface. On the left, there are three rows of search criteria: "secondhand smoke", "AND women", and "AND NOT pregnant". Below these rows are links for "Add a row" and "Remove a row". On the right, a dropdown menu is open, showing a list of search fields: "Citation and document text", "Citation and abstract", "Citation and document text", "Abstract", "Author", "Company/Org", "Document feature", "Document ID", "Document language", "Document text", "Document title", "Document type", "Image caption", "Location", "NAICS code", "Person", "Product name", "Publication title", "Section", and "Subject". The "Document title" field is highlighted. Two callout boxes provide additional information: "Boolean Searching" explains the use of AND, OR, and AND NOT; "Field Searching" explains the use of the dropdown menu to specify the search field.

**Boolean Searching**  
Combine your words with AND, OR, or AND NOT by using a drop-down menu. In this example, you would find articles on secondhand smoke and women excluding articles about pregnant women.

**Field Searching**  
Select where you want your word to appear by using a drop-down menu. In this example, "secondhand smoke" must be in the article title.

## More Search Strategies

If you are still having problems finding information, try the following search strategies:

### Try Different Wording (synonyms)

Think of different words that describe your topic.

Example: secondhand smoke

Try: passive smoking

### Try a Broader Search

Sometimes you may choose a topic that little has been written about or appears in a chapter of a book rather than in the main title. Try to think of a broader term to encompass your topic. The more general the search, the more likely you are to retrieve additional records.

Example: cigars

Try: tobacco

### Phrase Searching

Putting "quotes" around your search words tells the database that you are looking for that exact phrase.

Example: "secondhand smoke"

**Contact a librarian if you need more help.**

[Ask a Librarian](#) 24/7 Chat with a librarian. Accessible from the PC Library Home page  
Library Reference Desk (602) 285-7470

© Phoenix College Library Last updated: 06/24/2009