

# Literature Search Strategies

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Here are 20 strategies for finding scholarly literature relevant to your research topic. Melissa Cardenas-Dow, Les Canterbury, Jim Spickard, and Jim's students developed them for a University of Redlands library assignment.

## General Strategies

1. Search a database of scholarly journal articles, such as ProQuest, GreenFile, etc. *(There are many databases, but searching them is just one strategy.)*
2. Look up articles in paper copies of journals. *(This alerts you to other articles in those journals on your topic, including multi-article symposia, which do not show up in database searches.)*
3. For books: search your library's catalog. Search WorldCat or other combined catalogs.
4. Search Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>), including article references.
5. Search Google Books (<http://books.google.com>), including references.
6. Search Google (wisely; there's a lot of junk out there). Among other things, you can search for the authors of things you have found useful and see what else they wrote.
7. Search Amazon *(also wisely)*. *(Use the "Look inside" feature and check out a book's reference list.)*
8. Search for your favorite authors' Curriculum Vitae, to see what else they wrote.
9. Check out the footnotes and references on Wikipedia articles. *(Wikipedia is a place to start, not a place to end.)*
10. Search one of the Dissertation Abstracts databases. *(There are several. Google "dissertation abstracts" to find them.)*

## Backward-search Strategies (search for prior references)

11. Check out the reference list at the end of a good, relevant article on your topic.
12. Check out the reference list at the end of a good, relevant book on your topic. *(If the book lacks a reference list, you may have to look up your topic in the index, then check the footnotes on the relevant pages.)*
13. Locate published literature reviews on your topic. *(Check out journals like Annual Review of Sociology, etc.)*
14. Locate research proposals in an area you are investigating. These usually contain bibliographies and reference lists.

## Forward-search Strategies (search for subsequent references)

15. Use Citation Index to locate later articles that cite an article that you find useful.
16. Click the "Cited by" (or similar) link in the journal database you are using. *(This locates articles that cite the one you are viewing.)*

## Sideways-search Strategies (search for contemporaneous references)

17. Click the "find other articles like this", either on Google or in those databases that offer this service
18. Check out the "Customers who bought this item also bought" section on Amazon's book pages.

## Dataset Strategies

19. If your article uses a particular dataset, locate and examine other articles that also use that dataset.
20. Locate relevant datasets at sites like the [Census Bureau](#), [Berkeley Survey Data Archive](#), [National Center for Education Statistics](#), [ICPSR](#), and so on. Browse those sites for references to research. *(This can include special reports that might not be published elsewhere.)*