

Literature Search Strategies

Here are 16 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, including multi-article symposia, which do not show up in database searches.)
3. For books: search the library catalog. Search WorldCat or other combined catalogs.
4. Search Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>)
(including references)
5. Search Google Books (<http://books.google.com>).
6. Search Google *(wisely; there's a lot of junk out there)*.
(You can search for topics, but you can also search for the authors of things you have found useful. See what else they wrote.)
7. Search Amazon *(also wisely)*.
(Use the "Look inside" feature and check out a book's reference list.)
8. Check out the footnotes and references on Wikipedia articles.
(Wikipedia is a place to start, not a place to end.)
9. Search for your favorite authors' Curriculum Vitae, to see what else they wrote.
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.)

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

14. Use Citation Index to locate later articles that cite an article that you find useful.
15. 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)*

16. Click the "find other articles like this", either on Google or in those databases that offer this service.