

## Dissect a Database: Teach Yourself How to Search

Using a new database for the first time? Most databases, although they may look different, have similar features. Understanding the basic features will help you to improve your efficiency and effectiveness as you search. Even 5 minutes spent familiarizing yourself with a database can result in hours of time savings later.

### What is a database?

A database is an collection of information structured to allow for easier searching. They allow you to search through large amounts of information quickly and precisely. You probably use a database everyday—such as Google, a phonebook, Amazon.com, public library catalog or a financial data website. Use the [Databases A-Z](#) to view our databases.

### Before you begin

It can be helpful to start with the right attitude.

- Read the screen and be sure to scroll up and down to view the entire screen before you begin to search. Check for “mouse-over’s” which may give you more information.
- Experiment. Play. Remember, you can’t break it! Try a search for a personal topic to learn how the database works.
- Look for “Help” screens. These usually include example searches and even videos.
- [Ask a Librarian](#). We are available to help you search the article databases and find the materials you need.

### Subjects & Coverage

- What subject areas does the database cover (Business, Education, Legal, Psychology, Sociology, etc.) ?
- How old or how recent are the materials in the database?
- Can you find a list of journals or other materials included in the database?

**Try:** Check for links to “About this database” or “Help”.

### Searching

- How does it search?
- Can you search by keyword? Author? Subject? Title of article or journal?
- Does it search by word or by phrase?
- Can you use Boolean searching (AND, OR, NOT)?

**Try:** The “Help” screens will give more information about search techniques. Most database search functions are based on mathematical logic called Boolean (AND, OR and NOT).

- What are the database search shortcuts?

**Try:** Databases allow you to search on part of a word plus a symbol. The symbol tells the database to search for different types of the word or word endings. Common symbols for truncation or wildcard are \*, ?, ! and \$. Check the “Help” for more information.

- Is there a controlled vocabulary or thesaurus to help you find subject terms? Some databases allow searching by “authorized” terms used to describe topics. These terms are often created by professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association, Education Resource Information Center, National Library of Medicine and so on.

**Try:** Is there a link to “thesaurus” or “topics”? You can often browse or search the terms to find the one that is useful for your topic. You can then add them to your search.

## Working with Results

- How do I get the full text after the search? Most databases have full text results so you will see a link to the HTML Full Text or PDF. You have the option of taking off this setting to search everything in the database. Some databases have both full text and citation/abstract only.

**Try:** If full text is not available, click on the “Article Linker” to see if it is available in a different database. If the Library does not own material you need use the [Interlibrary Loan](#) service to get.

- How do you print, email, save? Can you get APA Citations?

**Try:** Check the “Help” to read about these features. Generally, select the items of interest by clicking in a checkbox or adding to a folder. Next click print, email or save and follow the directions. Many databases will give the APA citations when you print, email or save. Double check the formatting of the citations for errors using the *Publication Manual of the APA*.

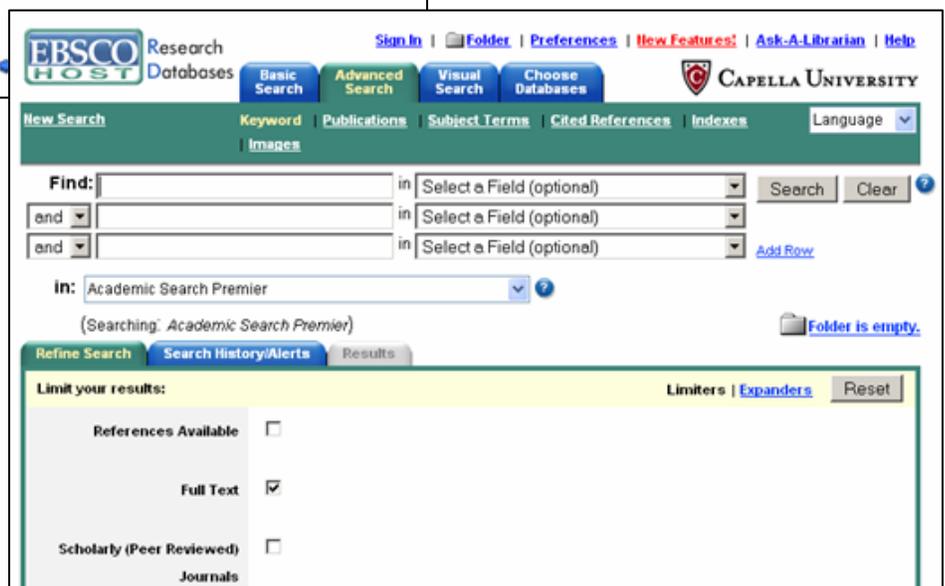
- Does it have features to allow you to organize your results?

**Try:** Many databases have different features that allow you to do more things with your results. Check the “Help” for more information. Many databases have personalization features you can use (after creating a free username and password). Then each time you login, the database will remember your searches and results. Most of the Library databases also work with bibliographic management software such as RefWorks, EndNote, Reference Manager and more. Check the “Help” in both the database and software you use for more information.

## Database Interface Examples



The screenshot shows the ProQuest Advanced Search interface. At the top, there are tabs for Basic, Advanced, Topics, Publications, and My Research. The 'Advanced' tab is selected. Below the tabs, there is a search bar and a dropdown menu for 'Citation and abstract'. There are three rows of search criteria, each with an 'AND' operator and a search bar. Below the search bars, there are buttons for 'Add a row', 'Remove a row', 'Search', and 'Clear'. At the bottom, there is a 'Database' dropdown menu set to 'Business - ABI/INFORM Global', a 'Date range' dropdown set to 'All dates', and a 'Limit results to' section with checkboxes for 'Full text documents only' (checked) and 'Scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed' (unchecked).



The screenshot shows the EBSCO Research Databases search interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Sign In, Folder, Preferences, New Features, Ask-A-Librarian, and Help. Below these are tabs for Basic Search, Advanced Search, Visual Search, and Choose Databases. The 'Advanced Search' tab is selected. The main search area has a 'Find:' label and three search bars with dropdown menus for 'in Select a Field (optional)'. There are 'Search' and 'Clear' buttons. Below the search bars, there is a dropdown menu for 'in: Academic Search Premier' and a note '(Searching: Academic Search Premier)'. At the bottom, there is a 'Limit your results:' section with checkboxes for 'References Available' (unchecked), 'Full Text' (checked), and 'Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals' (unchecked). There are also links for 'Limiters', 'Expanders', and a 'Reset' button.

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