

Effective Search Strategies Talking Points

As you start working on a research project, your instinct might be to go straight to Google and type your topic into the search bar. While that's a good starting off point, there are a lot of other resources you can access and search skills you can learn, that will make your research a lot easier, and more impressive. I've put together a handout with a list of law databases – some of which you can access for free with your library card. If you go to university, you'll be expected to use resources like this for *all* of your projects.

Databases vs. Google

Before we get into specific search skills, Can anyone tell me why a database might be a better search tool than Google for this project?

- Credibility!
- High level information that's not available for free (library pays for access to the database)
- Google isn't designed for high level research questions
- Believe it or not, once you know how to use a database, it's way easier to find relevant, specific articles
 - Why? Databases have "Subject headings" that organize the articles by topic

Demonstrate a search in Google vs. LegalTrac Gale Database "Criminal Profiling"

- Google gives you very shallow, definitions of the term
- Database gives you academic articles: examples, theory, research

While Google might be a great way to start learning about the basic legal terms you come across, these databases can be way more useful for your research projects. But first you need to learn how to use them properly. When using a database, ideally you want to get between 5 and 30 results. Can anyone tell me why you'd want that?

- Saves time – you don't have to sort through hundreds of possible articles if you can retrieve the best ones with a good search
- Ideally you want more than 1 though, so you can compare

Advanced Search techniques

- keyword vs. subject
 - keyword is a commonly occurring term in the article (could just be a related topic)
 - Subject is a word assigned to the article by a cataloguer or the author (it is extremely relevant to the article, and clicking on the subject will show other articles on the same topic)
 - Kind of like doing a hashtag search on twitter
 - For example in Legaltrac "Women in Prison" is not an official subject. "Women Prisoners" and "Women's prisons" are.
- Legaltrac DEMONSTRATION: "Wrongful Convictions" as keyword vs subject.
- And vs. Or
 - AND narrows your search. It is used to connect two topics into one (only articles with BOTH terms will appear)
 - OR broadens your search. It is used to split a search (articles containing either term will appear)
 - What would the disadvantage of using OR be?

- More articles, less relevant
- Boolean Search card game:
- Everyone gets a card. I'm going to call out a sample "search" using AND or OR, and if your card falls within the search, stand up.
 - Red AND Diamond
 - Red OR Diamond
 - Heart OR Club
 - Black OR Red
 - Black AND Red
- DEMONSTRATION: "Wrongful Convictions" AND "Canada" – 8 results
- Wildcard * tip
 - You can use the "*" symbol to broaden a search
 - It stands in for the remaining letters in a word.
 - For example "Library OR Librarians OR Libraries" could be shortened to "Librar*"
- DEMONSTRATION: "Canada" vs "Canad*"

Let's Practice. Raise your hand to vote for the most correct answer.

Your topic is "human rights issues in the prison system." What is the best database search?

- a) "Human rights in the prison system"
- b) Human Rights AND Prison System**
- c) Human Rights OR Prison System

Your topic is "Women's prisons in Canada." What do you search?

- a) "Canadian Women's Prisons"
- b) Women Prisoners OR Women's Prisons AND Canada**
- c) Women Prisoners OR Women's Prisons OR Canada

Your topic is "Criminal Profiling" What do you search?

- a) Criminal Profiling OR Criminal Profiler**
- b) Criminal Profil***

Databases:

Criminal Justice Collection

LegalTrac

Canadian Point of View

Canadian Legal Information Institution (canlii.org)

Law books

LegalTrac Features:

- Dictionary
- Search History
- Download Article
- Topic Finder
- Citations

Librarians can help you:

- Choose search terms
- Find online or book resources on any topic
- Discover a new book or movie you'll love
- Make an awesome button
- Etc.

Any Questions?