Improve Your Search Results

Have you tried searching an article database and got too many, or too few sources? In this short tutorial, you will learn tips to improve your search results.

Got too many results? It's generally said 100 results is a manageable result. More results will likely be unmanageable. But don't worry! There are lots of ways to focus your search.

First, try adding more keywords to your search strategy to narrow your search results. For example, if you searched "social media" and got too many results, you could add more keywords with the Boolean operator AND to narrow your search results.

- You could focus on a specific group of people. For example, you might search "social media" AND teenagers
- Maybe you'd like to focus on a specific geography? Try searching "social media" AND canada
- Finally, you could focus on a specific topic, such as by searching "social media" AND misinformation

Now let's look at a library web page to get an idea. You can also use limiters to focus your search results. Which limiters would be most useful for your research? Check the left side of your search results and select limiters relevant to your work. For example, do you want to find a specific kind of resource, such as journal articles, newspapers, or books? Look for a format limiter to focus on the type of resource you want. Do you need to focus your search on academic resources? Look for a "scholarly" or "peer reviewed" limiter. Want to focus your search on recent results? Check for a date limiter. Finally, check for a subject limiter and select terms relevant to your topic to focus your search.

Don't have enough results? Maybe you've done a search and haven't found enough articles for your assignment. Begin by checking that all keywords are spelled correctly (most databases won't correct spelling errors).

You can also try adding synonyms to your search with the Boolean operator OR. For example, if you were looking for articles on "social media," you might type "social media" OR facebook OR twitter OR Instagram. You can also use trunction* at the end of relevant keywords to expand your search. Truncation involves typing an asterisk at the root of a word to find any variations of that word. For example, if you're looking for articles on social media in Canada, try typing "social media" AND canad*. You will find Canada, Canadian, or Canadians.

Finally, remember no database has everything. Consider trying at least 2 or 3 databases to see if you get better results. Not sure which databases to choose? Ask a librarian for recommendations. If you need help improving your search results, ask a librarian.