

# Conducting a successful literature search:

## A researcher's guide to tools, terms and techniques

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Finding high-quality information can be a challenge. Sometimes you need help, but you aren't able to speak directly with an expert. Reference these cards when you need quick support—think of this as a Librarian in your back pocket!

-  1. Keywords, Operators & Filters
-  2. Search Tools
-  3. Types of Literature
-  4. Evaluate Information
-  5. Organize Research



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### 1. Keywords, operators and filters

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#### Brainstorm keywords

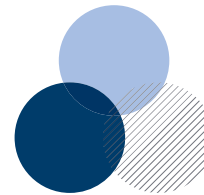
These are the main ideas of your research question/topic sentence.



#### Expand your keywords

Look at the subject headings of the materials you find and use those terms as applicable.

Or look up your keywords in a subject-specific database thesaurus to find predefined terms (called “*controlled vocabulary*”).



#### Use boolean operators

Insert **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT** into your search to broaden or narrow it.

**For example:**

PTSD **OR** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder **AND** soldiers **NOT** Navy.



#### Refine your search results

Filters in the database allow you to narrow a search by year, content type, etc.

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### 2. Search tools

Select the best tools:



#### Abstract and citation database

Short descriptions (abstracts) of research content so you can quickly get up to speed on a topic and determine what content is worth exploring more.



#### Full-text database

When you're ready to dive deeper into research, seek out searchable, multidisciplinary databases to access the full breadth and depth of research in web/PDF formats.



#### Search box on library homepage

Discover your library's full catalog to view a wide array of available research. \*Note: Not all databases may be included, so remember to check other databases, as well.

#### Institutional Repository (IR)

What other research is available to you? Check your library or website to discover the latest research produced at your institution. \*Note: Format may vary from final publication output.



#### Library catalog

When looking for items housed physically in the library (as well as some electronic items).



#### Web search engine

When looking for popular and widely-available content, web searches can return a full range of sources. \*Note: Not all results will pass research-level scrutiny.

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### 3. Types of literature

You should find:



#### Articles

##### Journal

Written by a researcher or scholar for a specific field, reviewed by peer scholars before publication

##### Magazine

Written by a journalist for a mass-market audience

##### Newspaper

Written by a journalist to inform the public about happenings in the world



#### Books

##### Monograph

A book on a specialized topic

##### Ebook

Any book accessible in full text online

##### Reference work

A collection of research, e.g., *encyclopedia*



#### Data

##### Types of available data:

- Equations
- Charts and Graphs
- Chemical Reactions
- Data Sets
- Maps /geographic data



*A name for other research material such as:*

#### Grey Literature

##### Conference proceeding

Panels, presentations and poster sessions at a conference

##### White paper

Document that often contains legislation, outlines future trends, or is a call for action on a topic

##### Dissertation or thesis

Student research papers often culminating in a master's degree or PhD

##### Patent

Rights to an invention granted by an official government agency

##### Other publication

Document not published in scholarly channels, such as a government document

##### Published report or dataset

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### 4. Evaluate information

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To determine trustworthiness of the material, try the **CRAAP test** developed by the *Meriam Library* at California State University, Chico<sup>1</sup>

#### Currency

- When was the information published and is that important to know?

#### Relevance

- How important is the information to your needs?

#### Authority

- Who is the author and what are their credentials?
- Do they work for a reputable institution?
- Was the information published in a peer-reviewed journal?

#### Accuracy

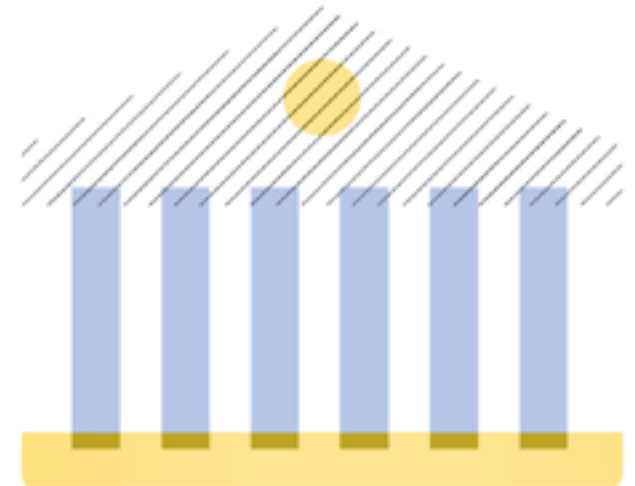
- How reliable is the information?
- Does it lack citations?
- Are there spelling errors?

#### Purpose

- Is it a well-balanced independent piece of research, or intended to sell a product or idea?

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[http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval\\_websites.pdf](http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval_websites.pdf)



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### 5. Organize research

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Save materials such as article **PDFs** into a document library and/or download the citation information

#### Citation Manager / Reference Manager / Document Library

An online tool or desktop software used to organize and store citations and full-text articles or other documents, create bibliographies, insert in-text citations into a paper, and share references with research partners.



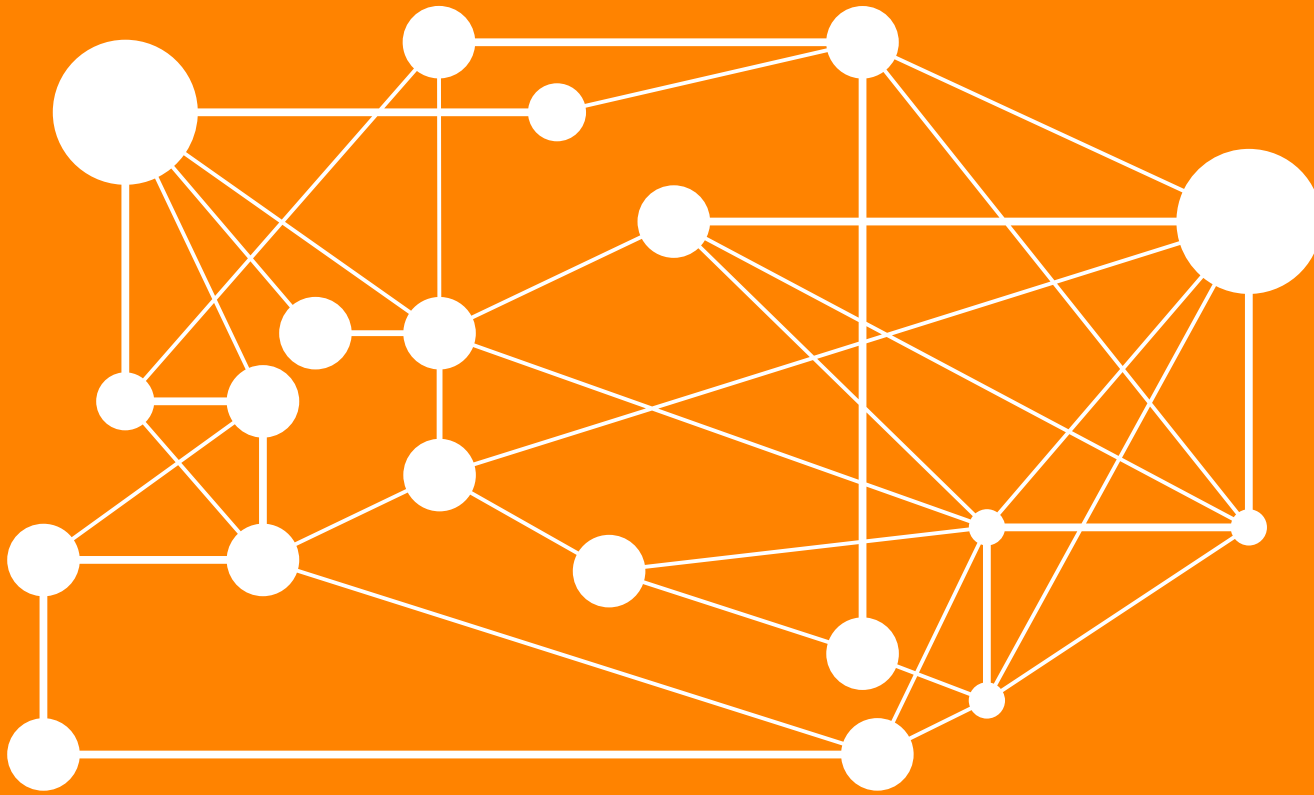
#### Citation

The act of explaining the source of the information found during the course of your research. Citation is a mandatory scholarly practice that gives credit and helps prevent plagiarism. Citations may be used in bibliographies, footnotes and within the body of your text. Common citation formats are **APA**, **MLA** and **Chicago style**.

#### Example:

Crystal Renfro, The Use of Visual Tools in the Academic Research Process: A Literature Review, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Volume 43, Issue 2, March 2017, Pages 95-99, ISSN 0099-1333, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.02.004>





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