# Transcript: Searching databases: How and why

In this video I will demonstrate how to do a structured search in a database.

I will be using IBSS, the International Bibliography of Social Sciences, but all the tips I share in this video should be applicable to other databases.

In this context, a database just means a collection of journal articles. Some also contain other types of literature, like conference proceedings and dissertations, but the bulk of their content is articles.

Some databases are tailored to a particular subject like education, while others cover a broader range of disciplines.

They don't necessarily provide links to the full-text of every article, but will tell you what has been published on a topic.

Here is IBSS.

The first thing to note is that I'm using the advanced search.

This is actually better for doing a structured search like this one – it helps to organise the terms logically so you can see what you're doing.

If you're looking at this and wondering what all the asterisks and question marks are for, this is covered in the previous video, "Tricks for searching databases", so maybe have a look at that first.

Here, I have added keywords for each of my three concepts into three separate boxes.

I am combining the different terms within a concept with OR, and linking my three concepts together with AND, from this drop-down menu, so that I can find articles which are about bullying and boys and secondary schools

You can click "Add a row" to add as many boxes as you have concepts.

These drop-down menus allow me to choose where to search.

Searching Anywhere is likely to get too many irrelevant results that just mention my keywords in passing.

Abstract and title will be more specific, and more likely to guarantee that my results are relevant.

It is worth considering that title might be too narrow – sometimes authors like to give their articles quirky titles to stand out from the crowd.

IBSS also has this option "Anywhere except full text" – this will search the abstract, title and any subject keywords.

Other databases may call this something else, like Topic.

Once I've run my search, if I'm not happy with it, I can go to Modify Search to change it.

I might spot another word or phrase that is worth including and rerun my search.

I can also use the filters on the left-hand side to restrict by the type of material, for example just scholarly journals, or use the slider to restrict by date.

All databases look slightly different, so it is worth spending a bit of time familiarising yourself with new ones.

If you are having trouble, you can ask your subject librarian for help.

Databases usually have webpages with detailed help and support as well.

Some articles will say Full text – PDF meaning the PDF is available straight away.

Others have this Find it @ Oxford button.

This will search SOLO to see if you have access through Oxford's subscriptions; for example, this article is available via Springer.

If no online results come up when you click it, we may not have access to the article.

Slide: If you still want to read the article, there are a few things to try.

You can request it as an interlibrary loan. These usually cost £5 but your department may cover the cost.

Our team will contact other libraries and send you a PDF copy of the article if one is available.

You can also recommend that the libraries buy a subscription to the journal – this can be expensive so not all requests will succeed.

Sometimes the author of an article has uploaded an open access version to their website or their institution's repository, which you can find by searching Google.

Lastly, if none of those options work, you may have to pay for the article yourself.

Slide: You might never have used a database before, and be wondering, why search here rather than SOLO or Google Scholar?

There are a few reasons why I would recommend searching different databases for your literature review.

The first is that databases are collections of journals curated by experts and will be more relevant to your field.

SOLO and Google Scholar by contrast try to cover every possible subject, and when you search them you will get vastly more results, most of which are likely to be irrelevant.

Second, databases allow you to do the more structured searching we have been working towards, using the tricks I've shown you and lots of alternative keywords.

SOLO will allow some of this, but is more limited.

Google Scholar doesn't work with most of these tricks, and it isn't possible to control what it is searching for – it will add in extra keywords that you might not be interested in based on its algorithms.

Lastly, databases tag their articles with these subject tags which you can see when you look at an article.

These can be really useful for your searches and are what we will be looking at in the next video.


Thanks for watching.