
Develop a Search Strategy

— Save Yourself Time! —

Understand the Search Process

Information research is a process of **trial and error**.

- **Brainstorm** search words with a research question in mind -->
- **Explore** initial search results (**Google** is ok here!) -->
- **Refine** your search, **adding or removing search words** based on your initial search -->
- **Conduct** a more targeted search (now in a **library database**) -->
- **Repeat one or more steps!** -->

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Construct Your Search Strategy (Example)

Research question: Can LSD be used to help people with posttraumatic stress disorder?

Step 1: Break up this research question into **two or three main concepts**. Ignore extraneous words.

- **Concept #1:** lsd
- **Concept #2:** posttraumatic stress disorder

Step 2: Conduct an **initial search** with these words, and quickly **scan the results**.

Step 3: Using information from your initial search, add **synonyms, acronyms, and variant spellings**.

- **Concept #1:** lsd, psychedelic, mdma
- **Concept #2:** posttraumatic stress disorder, ptsd

Understand the Nuts and Bolts

- Even if the search engine/database you are using doesn't require you to enter **boolean operators** (essentially the words **AND/OR**), it is still using them behind the scenes. It will help you to **know the logic behind your search**.
- **AND** gives you results that include **ALL** of your concepts.
- **OR** gives you results that include **ANY** of your concepts.
- Essentially, **you are searching:**
(lsd **OR** psychedelic **OR** mdma) **AND** (posttraumatic stress disorder **OR** ptsd)

What Would This Look Like in a Library Database?

Example:

The screenshot shows the ProQuest APA PsycInfo Advanced Search interface. The header includes the ProQuest logo and 'Access provided by HAVERFORD COLLEGE'. The main navigation bar has 'Basic Search', 'Advanced Search' (which is underlined), 'About', and 'Change databases'. Below this, the 'Advanced Search' title is followed by links for 'Command Line', 'Thesaurus', 'Field codes', and 'Search tips'. The search area contains two rows of search terms. The first row has a text input field containing 'lsd OR psychedelic OR mdma'. The second row has a dropdown menu set to 'AND' and a text input field containing 'posttraumatic stress disorder OR ptsd'. Below the search fields is a '+ Add a row' button.

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Basic Search Advanced Search About | Change databases

Advanced Search Command Line Thesaurus Field codes Search tips

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AND ▼ posttraumatic stress disorder OR ptsd

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