

HOW TO...

CHOOSE A DATABASE

To find articles on a particular topic, or to find directory and statistical information, use library databases. But how do you know **which** database to use? Here are some suggestions:

Know your subject

If you know the specific subject area that you need to research (history, literature, economics), look at the lists of specific subjects and select one from the databases page. Choose the closest match, even if not perfect. This will give you a list of recommended databases for that subject area, along with descriptions that tell you more.

When in doubt, cast a wide net

If you're unsure, you may want to choose a broad, multi-subject resource such as *Expanded Academic ASAP*. These databases cover a broad range of topics making them good starting points for research.

If more in-depth information is needed, go to a topical, subject-specific database if there is one in the field (for example, *MLA Bibliography* for literature.) Once you have gained experience, you will begin to know whether to use a broad general or a topical, subject-specific database.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Subject coverage.

If your topic is part of a broader subject, a subject-specific database might be more useful than a general one. Note that different topics within the same field (business, science, etc.) may require different databases.

Need background information?

Start with a general academic database, such as *Expanded Academic ASAP*, or an encyclopedia like the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Need in-depth scholarship?

Try more specialized resources like *PsycInfo*, *MLA Bibliography*, or *ATLA Religion Database*. Many scholarly databases contain little or no full text and yet are the **leading** indexes in their fields.

Is your topic clearly in a single discipline, or is it interdisciplinary?

Many well-defined fields have one or two main databases, which makes choosing a database easier. Other fields have no clear-cut favorite for basic research; several could be used, depending on interest. Interdisciplinary research, however, means being flexible and open-minded about sources. Start with a general academic database, such as *Expanded Academic ASAP*, or two or more subject databases that might cover aspects of your topic.

Need articles fast?

Some databases are full-text databases (with at least some articles to print or email immediately). But some of the best databases are NOT full text, so you may miss key resources if you ignore them.

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What kinds of resources are included?





Do you need articles from scholarly journals? Try subject-specific databases as opposed to very basic, general ones. Newspapers or other news sources? Popular magazines? Books? Directory or financial information on a company? Check the database descriptions to see which databases include these materials.

Dates covered.

Do you need current or historical information? Some databases include only the most recent few years, some go back 20 years or more. Some may not include the most current information. Again, check the database descriptions.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:

You should also consider print indexes; in some subjects, they are still a vital part of academic research.

-  **Seek advice** from a librarian or your instructor. You can contact Dena Luce, Extended Services Librarian, for assistance OR use the Ask-A-Librarian service on the library's website. (<http://www.faulkner.edu/gnl/askalibrarian.asp>)
-  **Use library handouts** and library web pages related to your topic. These are located just outside the Resource Room or many are also on the databases page of the library's website. (<http://www.faulkner.edu/databases.asp>)
-  **Scan the descriptions** of the library databases.
The most likely resources are listed first, but don't exclude other possibilities.
-  **Don't forget BOOKS** as sources.
For many topics they are invaluable, especially for in-depth and historical information. Note that some databases (including PsycINFO and MLA Bibliography) include book chapters. To find books on your topic, or to check if the library has the book(s) you've found through a database, start with the online catalog.
(<http://innopac.faulkner.edu>)