

Keys to Finding What You Need in Research Databases

PRELIMINARY STEPS

1. What question are you trying to answer? Write down or state your topic in your own words, and then identify the keywords (usually the nouns) that represent the most important concepts.

Sample topic question: What if any effect does **smoking** in **movies** have on **teenagers** and their decisions about whether or not to smoke?

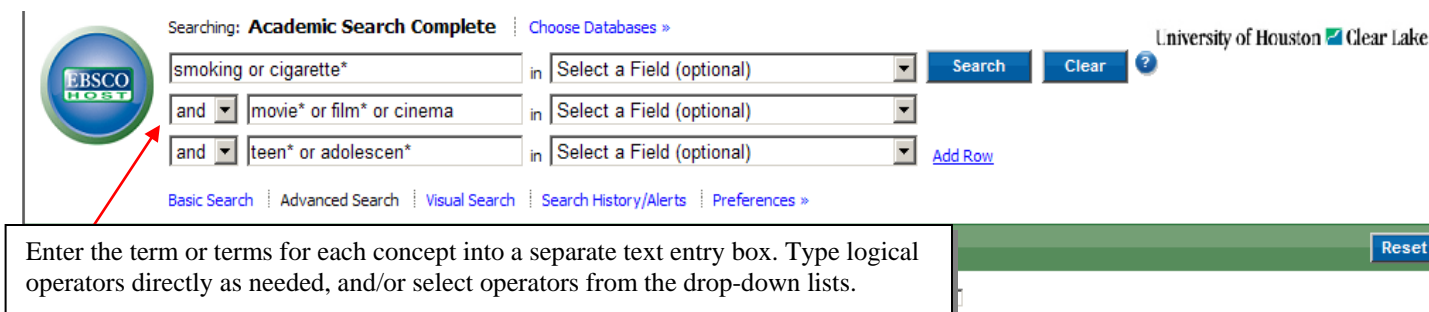
2. Think of synonyms, variations, or short phrases for your keywords, and construct a search statement using standard Boolean or logical operators (especially **AND** to require that all concepts be found and **OR** to find different terms for the same concept). Consider using wildcard symbols to retrieve variations of a distinctive word stem (most databases use the asterisk to truncate a search term, e.g., *teen** retrieves *teen*, *teens*, *teenager*, *teenagers*, etc.).

Concept		Concept		Concept
smoking or cigarette*	and	movie* or film* or cinema	and	teen* or adolescen*

BEGIN YOUR SEARCH

3. On the library homepage (<http://www.uhcl.edu/library>) click **Databases A-Z**, or click **Databases by Subject** followed by an appropriate academic subject link. Choose a database that includes coverage for your subject area and for the type of publication(s) you seek. Most research databases include indexing and selected full text for journal articles, but some specialize in books, conference papers, dissertations, or other publications. Find information about the content of a particular database through the **Info** and/or **Guide** links on the library website, or consult a Reference Librarian.

4. In your chosen database, look for a search screen that offers multiple text entry boxes. This usually will be the default search screen, but if not, look for wording like *Guided Search* or *Advanced Search*, and enter your search statement.



Searching: **Academic Search Complete** | Choose Databases >

University of Houston Clear Lake

smoking or cigarette* in Select a Field (optional) Search Clear ?

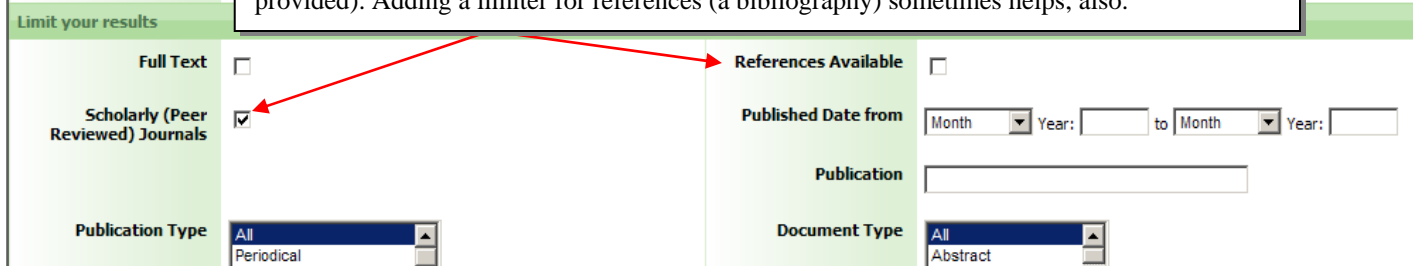
and movie* or film* or cinema in Select a Field (optional)

and teen* or adolescen* in Select a Field (optional) Add Row

Basic Search | Advanced Search | Visual Search | Search History/Alerts | Preferences >

Enter the term or terms for each concept into a separate text entry box. Type logical operators directly as needed, and/or select operators from the drop-down lists.

Most databases offer a variety of limiters, which you can use to narrow the focus of your search results. To find scholarly articles more quickly, add the limiter for peer-reviewed journals (if provided). Adding a limiter for references (a bibliography) sometimes helps, also.



Limit your results

Full Text

Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals

References Available

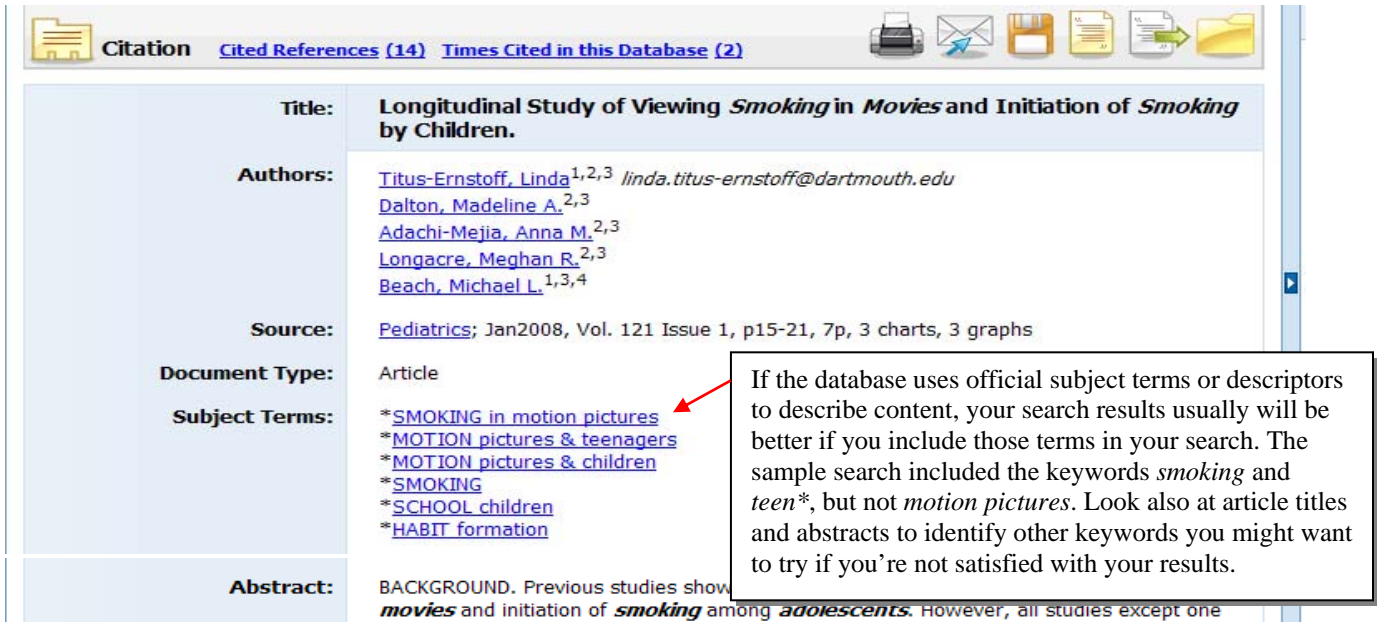
Published Date from Month Year to Month Year

Publication

Document Type All Abstract

REVIEW YOUR INITIAL RESULTS

5. Critically examine the relevant records found for possible ways to improve your search.



Citation [Cited References \(14\)](#) [Times Cited in this Database \(2\)](#)

Title: Longitudinal Study of Viewing *Smoking in Movies* and Initiation of *Smoking* by Children.

Authors: [Titus-Ernstoff, Linda](#)^{1,2,3} linda.titus-ernstoff@dartmouth.edu
[Dalton, Madeline A.](#)^{2,3}
[Adachi-Mejia, Anna M.](#)^{2,3}
[Longacre, Meghan R.](#)^{2,3}
[Beach, Michael L.](#)^{1,3,4}

Source: [Pediatrics](#); Jan2008, Vol. 121 Issue 1, p15-21, 7p, 3 charts, 3 graphs

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: [*SMOKING in motion pictures](#)
[*MOTION pictures & teenagers](#)
[*MOTION pictures & children](#)
[*SMOKING](#)
[*SCHOOL children](#)
[*HABIT formation](#)

Abstract: BACKGROUND. Previous studies show *movies* and initiation of *smoking* among *adolescents*. However, all studies except one

If the database uses official subject terms or descriptors to describe content, your search results usually will be better if you include those terms in your search. The sample search included the keywords *smoking* and *teen**, but not *motion pictures*. Look also at article titles and abstracts to identify other keywords you might want to try if you're not satisfied with your results.

REVISE OR REFINE YOUR SEARCH AS NEEDED

6. Are you finding **too many** irrelevant records? Narrow your search with one or more of these suggestions.

- Using the logical operator **AND**, add additional, relevant keywords or subject terms to your search statement. If you need more text entry boxes, look for a link that lets you *add a row*, or use parentheses to “nest” your search terms: (smoking or cigarette*) and prevent*.
- Use drop-down lists to restrict some or all of your keywords to specific fields (subject terms, title, etc.).
- Add relevant limiters (date range, publication type, peer-reviewed journals, etc.). Databases that specialize in a particular subject area (for example: America History and Life, Business Source Complete, PsycINFO, etc.) usually have additional limiters that are relevant to that discipline. Take the time to explore the search options.
- Consider using the logical operator **NOT** to remove specified keywords or terms from your results, or consider using proximity operators (**NEAR**, **WN**, etc.), which produce narrower results than the logical operator **AND**. For more information on these options, see onscreen help, individual database guides, or consult a Reference Librarian.

7. Are you finding **too few** records? Check first for typographical errors, and then broaden your search with one or more of these suggestions.

- Using the logical operator **OR**, add additional, relevant synonyms or alternative keywords or official subject terms that you did not use in your original search. In some databases you can use a Thesaurus or Subject feature to help identify appropriate search terms and an *explode* feature to search a subject term and all of its narrower terms at once.
- Truncate or stem your search terms by using wildcard operators. In addition to the commonly used asterisk, many databases offer additional wildcards.
- If available, search for all or some of your search terms in *full text* or *all text* fields.
- Simplify your search by removing less critical terms or concepts.
- Remove completely or expand the range of selected limiters.
- Try your search in a different database.

8. If you aren't finding what you need, we can help. Consult a Reference Librarian at 281-283-3910 or library@uhcl.edu.