Finding Information - Top tips

This video will give you an overview of finding information for your studies.

It can be hard to know where to start when you need to find some information or research to support your academic work, so here are a few tips.

These are resources you might use in your everyday life, but are not so good in academic work.

Our first tip is to take advantage of the resources the university provides. Cardiff University owns and subscribes to a wealth of resources to help you in your academic work. With your computer login, you have access to many electronic resources which are not available to the general public and which are suitable for your studies.

Our second tip is to use the Information Resources by subject pages, which are useful because they gather together search tools for your subject. The pages recommend search tools which are good starting points, such as Library Search and Google Scholar, and go on to recommend search tools for more specific requirements, whether that is a particular type of information or topic area.

The pages give you contact details for your Subject Librarian, so do get in touch with them to discuss your research or ask questions. They are happy to help.

Now, we'll look at using the search tools. Whether you are using Web of Science, Scopus, LibrarySearch or another search tool you will find things common to them all.

When you run a search, the first thing you'll notice is that it will bring back a much smaller number of results than a Google search, which would bring up millions for this particular search. This is because it will just show results which are high-quality scholarly articles, rather than anything anyone has put on the web. These articles are published in journals where academics like your lecturers write up their research. They are written by academics from universities and public institutions from all over the world.

Unlike Google you can alter the order of the results. Search tools allow you to order your results in different ways. You can order:

* by relevance to your search terms
* by date so you can see the most recent articles at the top, or
* by the most cited articles, which are these used the most by academics.

Viewing the abstract or summary of the article will give an overview of what it contains.

It can be ok to start with a basic search (as we have here) to get a sense of what is available, but then if you have too many results or they're not relevant (or even that you haven't found enough), you will want to improve the search to get better results. We'll give some tips on this next.

Let's look at some techniques for improving your search.

Here we are typing in a basic search. We are using quotation marks as this is an exact phrase. You can see this has come up with a very large number of results. You can easily edit this search

Here we are using the word 'OR'. This will help you include additional terms, and will help expand your search. As you can see, our results have now increased.

To reduce the number of results we will now use 'AND' to combine keywords. First, we will add another search field. Ensure that AND is selected in the drop down menu. You can use AND to combine different concepts that you want to search together. AND is useful to make your search more specific. You can see that our number of results has decreased.

You can use the asterisk symbol to replace letters at the end of a word stem. This is useful in ensuring you cover the whole range of available word endings for your search term. This search will find results that contain either “global warming” or climate change, but all of them will include the word farming or agriculture, agricultural, agricultures etc.

We still have a large number of results.

There are other ways you can limit a search – you can see her on the left you can limit your results by year, subject and source type amongst other options. As you can see, this can reduce the number of results considerably.

Once you have found results relevant to you, you will want to read the full text of an article. Many databases such as SCOPUS only hold the summary of the article, and not the articles themselves. You can see from the list of results here that you have a 'Check for full text' icon below each reference. This will open up the article in Librarysearch, which checks to see if the university has access to the journal. Click on view online - you can then download this article from this webpage – look out for links such as ‘Download PDF’ as all databases will use similar terminology.

Other types of databases provide immediate access to full text. Proquest Databases such as ABI is an example of this, as is JStor. Looking at this list of results you can see that a PDF is available, and can be immediately downloaded.

It is important to keep a note of your results, and journal databases are set up help you with this. The databases all work in similar ways.

Here we are looking at SCOPUS. Select the results you want to save by clicking in the box beside them. At the top you will see a range of options. Some databases offer a registration option and you can set up a personal account, which will allow you to keep track of useful material you have found. If you use a database on a regular basis it is a good idea to create a personal account.

This video has given you an overview on how to search for information. Please ask in your library if you need any further help or any more information.