

# AIRS

## Advanced Information Research Skills

### AIRS Module 2

Preliminary search 



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# Module 2: Preliminary search

This module introduces the search process, provides activities to practice preliminary searches, and outlines a set of available search tools and resources. By the end of this module you will:

- Develop a systematic approach to searching the literature using a search methodology.

## 2.1 The search process

In this section you will be reminded of basic search techniques, be introduced to the search process in general, and begin considering your search terms.

### Develop your search methodology

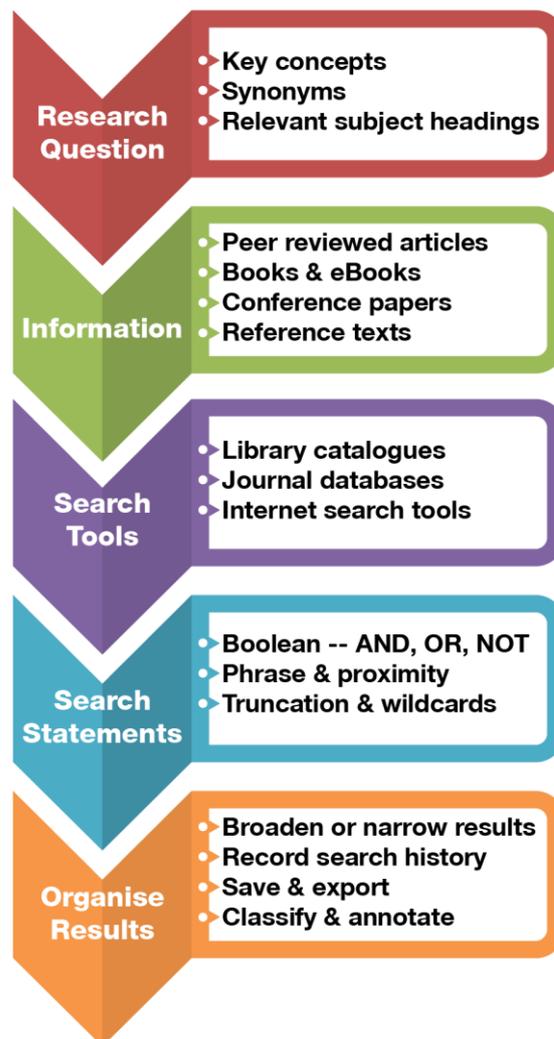
Depending on the stage you are at in your research, or the search objective, a specific type of searching may be most appropriate. Consider the search methodology below as a way to ensure effective and efficient searches.

1. Preliminary searching
2. Browsing journals
3. Comprehensive searching
4. Cited reference searching
5. Limiting - a search process technique used in the types of searching
6. Sustaining - with alerts

### Steps in the search process

Once you have formulated your research question, you are ready to start searching. A well organised search ensures that information is efficiently and comprehensively retrieved and involves the following steps:

- identify your **research question**, synonyms and relevant subject headings
- consider the **types of information** required to answer the question including peer reviewed articles, books, conference papers and reference texts
- use appropriate **search tools** to find relevant and accurate information including library catalogues, journal databases and internet search tools
- design appropriate **search statements** and operators, including Boolean operators, phrase and proximity searching, truncation and wildcards
- **limit** the results of your search appropriately and **organise** your records using bibliographic management software.



## Unpacking the search process

Consider the search process in terms of four questions that need to be answered:

1. **What are you researching?** What are the key terms and synonyms that define your question? Are there subject terms that encompass the identified concepts? What type of information is important in your discipline area? For example, journal articles, conference papers, definitions from dictionaries etc.
2. **Where will you search?** Which tools will you use to find information? Will you use the catalogue and Google Scholar to get started to get a sense of how others describe your topic area?
3. **How will you express your search terms in the search tools?** How will you construct your search statements and which search techniques will you use?
4. **How well did your search retrieve results?** Evaluate and broaden or narrow your search.

## The literature review

A good literature review requires an effective and comprehensive literature search. The process of developing an effective search methodology will assist you to do your literature review required for your Stage 2 proposal.

A literature review is an evaluative report of information found in the literature related to your selected area of study. The review should describe, summarise, evaluate and clarify this literature. It should give a theoretical base for the research and help you (the author) determine the nature of your research. A good literature review should:

- find what information already exist in your field of research
- identify the gaps in the literature
- find experts working in your field
- identify major seminal works
- identify main methodologies and research techniques
- identify main ideas, theories and conclusions and establish similarities and differences
- provide a context for your own research
- show relationships between previous studies and theories.

Writing the literature review allows you to demonstrate skills in the areas of information seeking and critical appraisal.

## Defining search terms

The first step in the process of searching is to identify the key concepts from your research question or search objectives. These concepts describe the kinds of information you need to investigate in order to answer your research question. Consider the concepts in the context of key readings you are already aware of or search around the topic generally before commencing serious research. A concept or mind map can help explore your topic and clarify the logic of these concepts and illustrate their relationships. You should also consider the different search objectives you might have relevant to the different sections of your thesis or stages of your research.



**Example of a concept map:** A concept map puts the main topic in the centre of the map and graphically represents the major concepts that relate to the main topic.



Watch the video: [Develop a concept map](#)

## 2.2 Preliminary searching in more detail

### Introduction

Initial or preliminary searching helps in establishing a basis for later specific or more comprehensive searching. Preliminary searching can help clarify the topic and supply basic knowledge upon which to develop an improved searching focus. It can help you refine your research question, find synonyms and to become clearer on the direction of your research. In

addition, preliminary searching will assist identification of the key terminology in your field for the constructs you are interested in exploring. It is important to determine and use the terminology that experts in your field use, consider how the database thesaurus treat the terms in your research question - are there relevant subject headings? Remember, recognisability is about whether you can identify the terms in your question in the literature. Refer back to the property of recognisability for clarification. Question 1B of the resource log requires analysis of the recognisability of the theoretical constructs in your question – 1. Identify the constructs and 2. Justify the terminology used in your question. For preliminary searching, use general or broad search tools such as [Quick Find](#), [Google Scholar](#) and the [Library Catalogue](#).

### Finding synonyms

Before starting to search, spend some time formulating the key concepts of your research question, identifying synonyms for the words and phrases, and defining them within the theoretical framework of your topic. Explore the meaning of terms using a dictionary and find synonyms with a [thesaurus](#). You will find more synonyms when you start searching, so keep adding them to your resource log as you progress through this unit. Write a list of key authors or seminal works that you already know to be relevant to answering your research question.

### Searching subject headings

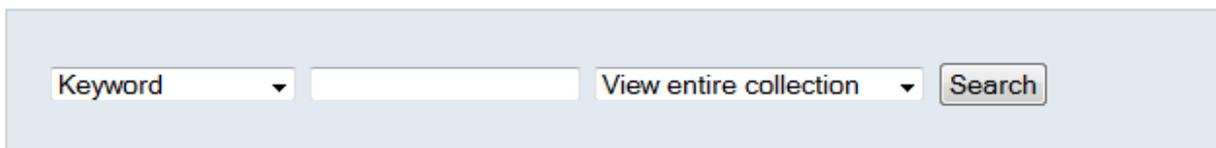
Subject headings are a set of terms and phrases, from a controlled vocabulary that are used to describe the content of books and articles and are assigned by cataloguers and indexers. Subject headings take some of the guess work out of searching, saves time and help make searching more effective and efficient and in many cases more directed. There are many different ways to describe the same term, a subject heading brings these terms together under a single word or phrase. Look to see whether the database you are searching has a thesaurus to browse for the subjects that match your topic/word/phrase.

Using [Quick Find](#) and the [Library Catalogue](#), both found on the Library homepage.

## Activity – Subject headings

At the [QUT Classic Catalogue](#)

### Search the classic catalogue



1. Change keyword search to subject search
2. Search individually on each theoretical construct from your research question
3. Consider the search results – are there other words/phrases that might be more appropriate than the existing terms in your research question?

## Activity – Quick Find

Go to the [QUT Library homepage](#) and start searching, using Quick Find.

### Quick Find



1. Enter words from your research question and click the search icon.
2. Skim results; evaluate titles, citations and abstracts.
3. From the most relevant results, use alternative terms to refine your search. Repeat until your result improves.
4. On the left of the result screen, 'refine your search' results by selecting filters.

Quick Find tips:

- Use double-quotation marks to search for words that go together, e.g. “teacher education”.
- Refine your search to articles from peer-reviewed publications.
- Search using a seminal author last name with a topic word.
- Filter by format, study area, or date range.

Advantages to using Quick Find

But keep in mind

Useful for preliminary searching as a starting point to identifying key terminology.

Quick Find combines results from the library catalogue, many databases and QUT ePrints.

Searching is fast, easy, and uses a familiar interface.

Search results include citations of many kinds of sources: books, journal articles, newspaper articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, photos, multimedia, and much more.

Not appropriate for comprehensive searches – use subject-specific databases instead.

Vague or short searches will return too many results; searches using well-refined search terms or phrases in quotes will return fewer, more refined results.

Be aware that Quick Find doesn't provide access to all scholarly material available at QUT.

Search mechanism is less sophisticated than those available within individual database platforms.

## Known item searching

Search the [QUT Library Catalogue](#) to find items by title, author or ISBN/ISSN.



Looking for a specific journal article and you know the journal name? Watch the video to find out how: [Searching for an article](#)

### Activity – find items using the QUT Classic Catalogue

Go to the [QUT Classic Catalogue](#), then:

1. in the drop down box change keyword to Title (to search by resource title)
2. in the text box enter “meaningful learning with technology”, and click ‘Search’. A list of results will appear
3. click on the first entry listed
4. scroll down to the Subject section of the record. The subject tags are clickable links which allow browsing for books with the same subject

<b>Subject</b>	<a href="#">Educational technology.</a>
	<a href="#">Teaching -- Aids and devices.</a>
	<a href="#">Learning.</a>
	<a href="#">Constructivism (Education)</a>

5. click on the ‘Constructivism (Education)’ link. This presents search results for related subjects
6. click the subject ‘Constructivism Education’ to list all books with that general subject
7. reorder the results. From drop down box on the top right, choose ‘Publication Year’, click ‘Sort’.

## 2.3 Other search tools

### Introduction

This section introduces additional search tools that may be useful to identify information for your research question. By the end of the section, you will have explored a range of resources including grey literature (information that has not been published commercially or indexed in major databases), other library catalogues and the technique of browsing important journals in your area of interest. See more on [grey literature](#).

### Selecting databases for your research

Databases can be used for many different aspects of your research, from developing your research proposal, writing your literature review, conducting research activities, writing up your results and discussing the significance and impact of your research.

Searching databases at the start of your research journey can:

- inspire creative ideas
- consolidate your understanding of your research area
- help you write a good research question
- accelerate the research proposal writing process
- Provide the framework of study for the duration of your degree.

Explore a few different databases to see what sorts of information they contain. Ask your supervisory team and your [Liaison Librarian](#) for guidance on what databases may be appropriate

to answering your research question.

#### Activity – finding the right databases

1. Go to the QUT Library [Databases and specialised search tools](#) page.
2. Select your subject area.
3. Note the divisions by study area, formats and specialist researcher databases.
4. Read the synopses for the databases that are likely to be relevant. Consider subject relevance and breadth of coverage and the types of formats indexed in the database.

## Other search tools

Beside databases for journal articles and conference papers, there are a number of other search tools or sources you may want to refer to early in your research.

## Finding theses

Examining theses in your discipline is good practice and is recommended early in your candidature. This strategy will assist in thinking about how to structure and format your thesis, the originality of your idea or question, and provide a source of rich bibliographies. Think about theses in terms of local, national and international content. For QUT theses check QUT ePrints, Australian theses can be found in Trove and international in ProQuest Dissertations. Most universities, in many countries and some regions have open access repositories for theses, research publications, and sometimes datasets for researchers.

There are a number of tools available from QUT Library and the web for finding theses in your research area:

 [QUT ePrints](#) contains the online QUT theses.

 [Trove](#) provides access to the Australian theses managed by the National Library.

 [ProQuest Dissertations](#) contains international theses with a US focus.

 [Google Scholar](#) gives access to most open access repositories.

For links to international, regional and national repositories, see the [Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations](#) list.

## Finding key journals

Scanning the latest issues of certain journals is a valuable strategy to:

- gain an understanding of the research being done around your topic
- help you reflect on the scope and direction of your research
- identify the current trends in a discipline
- to ensure you find valuable information that might be overlooked in a database search.

After searching journal databases and identifying the best articles for your topic it may become apparent that the most relevant articles are consistently found in a handful of journals.

Find out which journals are specific to your topic area:

- recommendations from your supervisor
- select high quality journals by subject area journals using Scopus, Web of Science and Ulrichsweb
- search using your key concepts in Quick Find with results limited by relevant journal format and subject terms to evaluate for best sources
- Use the [advanced search](#) feature in the Classic Catalogue search by subject and limit to the periodicals collection.

### Online journals via publisher websites

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Some publishers may cover your subject area better than others. Journal publisher websites give quick access to the tables of contents, so you can scroll through the recent issues to get a feel for current trends. You might notice 'hot topics' of the day and adjust your research scope to consider new concepts or frameworks. You can subscribe to receive notification of the table of contents of new issues of key journals by email.

Here are some key journal publishers for QUT faculty areas:

- [Routledge/Taylor and Francis](#) and [Wiley](#) – multidisciplinary
- [Intellect](#) for arts, design, cultural studies, communication and media, film studies
- [Elsevier](#) and [Springer](#) for science, health and medicine
- [Wolters Kluwer](#) for law, business and health
- [Edward Elgar](#) for business, economics, politics, law
- [Sage](#) for education, arts, media, health, psychology, engineering, criminology and more
- [Emerald](#) for information technology, business and management.

### Browsing print journals

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In some subject areas, print journals are important. These areas tend to be the disciplines with a high reliance on images, e.g. art and design, music and architecture. Scanning the latest issues of print journals can therefore be a valuable option. New issues are available in the journal section of QUT Library. To physically browse and locate what the Library has in print find out the general [call number range](#) for your research area. Popular print journals include:

- [Wallpaper](#) (fashion)
- [Rolling Stone Australia](#) (popular music)
- [Monument](#) (architecture)
- [Harvard Business Review](#) (business)
- [New Scientist](#) (science).

## Other library catalogues

Most universities provide access to their library's catalogue online and there are 'union catalogues' with the holdings of many libraries. The QUT Library can get you most items via online request using Bonus+ or [Document Delivery](#). You can also request that your Liaison Librarian purchase additional items for the QUT Library collection.

Union catalogues include:



[Bonus+](#) provides access to the collections of participating libraries across Australia and New Zealand.



[Trove](#)



[WorldCat](#) is the world's largest catalogue, containing library catalogue holdings from many countries.

## Summary

You have started to explore the QUT Library database page to find databases that are relevant to your topic area. You have considered the usefulness of theses, journals, and other library catalogues for your research.