Tips, Tricks, and Tools for Thesis Research

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Beginning at the beginning...
Finding a good topic

Read encyclopedia entries related to what you might like to write about to narrow your topic.

Wikipedia is a great place to begin your research, but it isn’t a good place to end your research.
Keep a research journal!

Things to write in your research journal:

● Links to sources related to your topic
● Phrases and terms related to your topic (these will change as you find out more about your topic)
● Notes about how all of your sources fit together, questions you have as you read, etc.
Constructing a good search string

- Determine “keywords” or “key phrases” from your research question.
- Write down all the synonyms you can think of for each keyword or key phrase.
- Search 1-3 key words or phrases per search so your search doesn’t become too narrow.
- Document your searches in your research journal so you remember what combinations you’ve searched before in each database.
How to find stuff on the Internet

Google Advanced Search: https://www.google.com/advanced_search

You can limit types of websites you search by specifying the domain. For example: .org only searches organization websites, .gov only searches US government websites, and .edu only searches educational institutions’ websites.


Google Scholar Advanced Search: https://scholar.google.com

Click the little triangle in the right of the search box for the Advanced Search! Remember to add UMass to your Google Account under Library Links to link directly to articles the Libraries own in your search results!
What is a website?
Information sources that can be on websites include...

- magazines
- newspapers
- galleries of art or photos
- academic articles
- books
- essays
- creative writing
- white papers
- technical and scientific reports
- pretty much any digitizable type of human expression!
So how can you tell what types of online information are appropriate for your thesis?
What makes academic articles and books special?

They go through a process called peer review.

Can anyone tell me what peer review is?
Using Library Resources

**Subject Research Guides**: Curated resources and strategies for starting research on your subject.

**Subject Librarians Directory**: These librarians are your first point of contact for the extensive range of services and resources offered by the UMass Amherst Libraries.

**RefWorks Citation Manager Guide**: RefWorks acts as a repository where you can create and store references (citations) exported from electronic databases, library catalog, websites, or created by you.
Boolean Search Terms

Add quotes around a group of words to search for an exact phrase.

Example: Search “Climate change” with and without quotes to see how your search results change!

Use AND between two words or two phrases in quotes to search for multiple words or phrases in the same source.

Example: “Climate Change” AND “Massachusetts”

Use OR between two words or two phrases in quotes to search for synonyms.

Example: “climate change” OR “global warming”
More boolean search terms

Use NOT between two words or two phrases in quotes to exclude things from your search.

Example: “climate change” NOT “global warming”

Use an asterisk at the end of a word to search multiple variants of a word.

For example: “climate chang*” [searches “climate change,” “climate changes,” and “climate changing”]
Use RADAR to evaluate web resources

**Relevance** – Is the source relevant to your information needs?

**Authority** – Who is the author(s) of the work and what are the person’s credentials?

**Date** – Is the information current? Does your research require timely sources?

**Appearance** – Does the source look professional? Are there advertisements, typos, or biased language?

**Reason** – What is the purpose of the information: to inform, advertise, entertain, or persuade?
A Librarian for Every Subject

http://www.library.umass.edu/services/research/liaisons
Good Luck!

Questions?
Contact me at kfreedman@library.umass.edu, or contact any of our excellent subject librarians!