Developing a Search Strategy – Archaeology

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When conducting research into a new topic area it is really important to think about the way in which you search for information. An effective search strategy can not only save you time, but it can help ensure that you do not miss any key resources.

If you are conducting a large piece of research for your qualification you may be required to submit evidence showing how you searched the literature. Taking the time to formulate a strategy before beginning your search, and recording any amendments that you make to it as you go along, can make writing up much easier.

Search Strategy Tips:

The following process may be useful in formulating your search strategy:

1. Think about your research project in terms of a title, e.g. “The representation of archaeology in the media”

2. Identify the keywords in your title, e.g. archaeology, media

3. Find synonyms (alternate terms) for each of your keywords. There may be many options, e.g. media or television, or radio. The more synonyms you use the more comprehensive your search.

4. Use quotation marks to search for phrases, e.g. “Time Team”, “Alice Roberts”

5. Apply truncation (* or $ or ?) at the end of a word to find variant endings, e.g. archaeolog* would find archaeology, archaeologist, archaeological

6. Apply wildcards (normally ?) to replace any single letter within a word to find variant spellings, e.g. wom?n will find woman and women

7. Combine the different elements of your search using AND/OR/NOT:
   - AND finds references containing both terms (this will narrow your search results) e.g. archaeolog* AND media
   - OR finds references containing either term (this will widen your search results) e.g. media OR televis* OR radio
   - NOT excludes references. Use this with extreme caution!

8. Use brackets to bring together all the aspects of your topic into a concise search statement, e.g. (archeolog*) AND (media or televis* or radio)
Bibliographic Databases for Archaeology:

Bibliographic databases contain lists of references to all of the research that has been published across a broad subject area and are a vital source of information when conducting research. The databases index a range of resources including individual journal articles, chapters within edited books and conference proceedings. Some of the databases include links through to the full text of the articles; others just contain an abstract (a summary) of the article. The Library offers an inter-lending service to obtain items from other institutions if we do not hold them at York – please see the Library website for more information: http://www.york.ac.uk/library/borrowing/interlending/

The University of York subscribes to a large number of databases; these are all accessible via the E-resources Guide: http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/e-resources. You will need your university user name and password to log in. The following databases are particularly relevant to archaeology students:

**BIAB** and **AnthroSource**: Subject specialist resources indexing publications in the fields of archaeology and anthropology. The *British & Irish Archaeological Bibliography* lists scholarly works in the field of archaeology from 1695 to the present day.

**British Humanities Index**: Indexes over 350 international humanities journals including over 10,000 articles on the subject of archaeology.

**Web of Science**: A large multi-disciplinary database with coverage of over 10,000 journals in the sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities, as well as international proceedings coverage for over 120,000 conferences.

Many of the bibliographic databases use search grids which make combining the different aspects of your topic much more straightforward. Below you can see our example search transferred into a search grid on the *British Humanities Index*:

![Image of British Humanities Index search grid]

The different keyword areas of the search are added into the two text boxes with the word “or” used to separate the different alternate terms. These terms are then combined using the “AND” option shown in the drop down menus on the left.

**Further Help**: For more information about the resources at York of specific interest to Archaeology students please see the Archaeology Subject Guide: http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/archaeology