Searching for Sources on the Mason Library Databases

The Mason Library website is your one-stop shop for all the tools you need to find sources for your research. From subject-specific databases to library liaisons, you’ll find a wealth of resources and help there.

Infoguides for each major:

On the Library Search page, click on “Subject Guides” and then “Infoguides.” Find the Infoguide for your discipline and explore it: it will include links to many different kinds of important resources in your discipline: databases, journals, books, datasets, websites, and more.

Accessing the Databases:

1. Go to Mason’s library webpage at library.gmu.edu.
2. Click “Search,” which is the first link on the main heading.
3. Once you have accessed the Search page, five categories will become available. Click “Articles and Databases.” On this page, you can access databases alphabetically or by subject.
   - Search by subject to identify databases that index sources from your specific discipline.
     a. Every academic discipline has a different set of core databases that index the most important sources in that field. In order to locate those core databases, click on your desired subject. The librarians have identified the most important databases in each subject.
     b. For example, if you are writing a paper for the field of Economics, your core databases include Business Source Complete, EconLit, and the Economist Historical Archive.
   - Search alphabetically for specific databases such as JSTOR, ProjectMuse, or ProQuest, if you want a database that indexes sources from multiple disciplines.
     a. If your paper topic is grounded in several different disciplines, or if your major is interdisciplinary, you may want to use a database that indexes sources from many disciplines. (And by using a subject or field filter, you can also conduct searches for sources from specific disciplines using these more general databases.)
     b. One disadvantage of using the multidisciplinary databases is that you will have to sift through a much larger result list, and you still may not be accessing sources that are authoritative in your field.

Database Search Strategies:

Once you are on an appropriate database, knowing how to use the search function is half of the battle to finding sources. You will probably have to do a lot of trial and error with your search terms.

1. Based on your topic or research question, make a list of keywords and phrases that you think could yield interesting results. For every word on your list, try generating another synonym for the word.
2. Start plugging in your keywords and synonyms in the search bar.
a. If you are receiving a very large list of results (in the thousands) and only one or two per page pertain to your topic, then you may need to narrow your search terms and to make them more specific.

b. If you are receiving a very small list of results (under fifty) and only one or two per page pertain to your topic, then you may need to broaden your search terms to make them more general.

c. If you find an article that fits into your research, your database should provide a list of keywords associated with the article. Feel free to click these or try them as search terms.

3. On any database, clicking the “Advanced Search” function will help you yield more specific results.

a. Combining two search terms with “AND” will produce results that have both terms included. Combining two search terms with “OR” will produce results that have one or the other.

b. You can also specify where you want your search term to appear.
   i. For example, you can search for your term in the journal title, article title, author name, etc.

c. If you type multiple words into the search bar, the results will have those words appearing anywhere, in any order, and possibly not together. However, if you want the multiple words to appear in that particular order and always together, put them in quotation marks.
   i. For example, if you type Jane Eyre without quotation marks, you will receive results for Jane Eyre, Jane, and Eyre. However, if you type “Jane Eyre” in quotation marks, you will only receive results for Jane Eyre.

Liason Librarians

Most disciplines at Mason hire a librarian who specializes in that field. While all the librarians can be helpful resources for you, your major’s Infoguide will give you the contact information of the librarian or librarians who can help specifically in your field. Take advantage of them!

Workshops

The library also offers a number of workshops that you can sign up for on their website. On the main page, click the “Learn” tab and then click “Attend a Workshop.” Here you will find the calendar of workshops that the library offers.

Workshops include Using Zotero (a program that manages your sources and helps format your bibliography), Writing a Dissertation or Thesis, and Data Management Basics.

Last updated 6/19/2014