

# Research Paper 101 Series

## Step Three B: Using Library Resources

Now you know what kinds of evidence you need and understand how to evaluate resources, it is time to start searching for them using the library catalogue and databases. These avenues of discovery contain items that have been carefully selected for their scholarly content.



Seeking scholarly information? Come to the library!

### 1. What is available at the library?

The library **catalogue** ([www.briercrest.ca/library](http://www.briercrest.ca/library)) provides access to a wide variety of print and electronic books and other resources. These include

- Monographs: a specialist work on a single subject or an aspect of a subject
- Collected essays: a single volume of essays by various authors either about a single subject or a variety of subjects.
- Reference material: dictionaries and encyclopedias
- Periodicals: journals and magazines

The library **databases** ([www.briercrest.ca/library/databases/](http://www.briercrest.ca/library/databases/)) provide access to a large number of online journals as well as ebooks. The library website subdivides databases in three ways:

- Alphabetically: browse all databases regardless of content.
- Subject Area: browse by the subject area appropriate to your topic.
- Content: choose the appropriate content type (ebook, dissertation etc.).

### 2. Search Strategies

**Goal: you want to find enough resources to meet your assignment requirements and engage in the scholarly conversation, but not so many that it is hard to find relevant resources.**

*Too few resources means you need to broaden your topic.*

*Too many means you need to narrow it down.*

Efficiently search the catalogue and databases using **keywords** or **subject headings** or both:

- a. **Keyword** searching: using your research question and thesis statement, select the keywords or phrases that represent what your idea is about. Utilize the concept cloud method from *Step 2: Developing a Topic* to think of *related* keywords such as synonyms or the singular or plural form of a word. **Keywords can be used to search any field of a record: title, abstract, full text etc.**

Example thesis statement	Keywords	Related Keywords
Polish hero Witold Pilecki's daring efforts provided valuable intelligence to the Allied Resistance during World War II.	Witold Pilecki, World War II, Allied Resistance, intelligence	espionage, Auschwitz, Witold's Report, Poland, Allies, concentration camp(s)

Then use Boolean searching to combine two or more keywords to return a focused set of results. There are three Boolean operators:

	Purpose	Example
AND	Narrows a search by focusing on where different concepts intersect.	Pilecki AND Auschwitz
OR	Finds related concepts. Can return lots of results, so use carefully!	(concentration camp) OR (death camp)
NOT	Used to exclude a concept from a search.	Poland NOT Germany

Boolean operators can also be used in combination:

Pilecki AND (Auschwitz OR (concentration camp)).

In the examples above, parenthesis have been used to indicate to the search engine when a group of words should be searched as a phrase or when more than one Boolean operator is in use. **Each database will have different search rules, so refer to the database's help page to clarify whether to use parenthesis, quotation marks or brackets.**

- b. Search by Subject headings. Subject headings are preset vocabulary that identify what a resource is *about*. Searching by subject headings will help you identify everything the library catalogue or database has on a specific topic and can help you narrow down an existing search result set.

**Hint:** After conducting a database search, additional options for narrowing your search results can be found on the left-hand side of the page. Subject heading filters can often be found there.

### 3. *Final recommendations*

- As you conduct your searches, take the time to dig deeper. Don't settle for the resources on the first page of your search results. Keeping going through the next five or six pages.
- Make use of any **Advanced** or **Refine** search options to focus your list of results.
- Have you found one really good resource?
  - Review the bibliography or reference list to see if the author cited resources that would be of use to you. They probably did!
  - Investigate relevant subject headings associated with the item record. What other resources do they lead you to?

**Remember:** library staff are here to help! If you need help refining search terms or finding or using a specific resource come in person to the reference desk (Monday through Thursday 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm) or ring the bell at the circulation desk. You can also send an email to library@briercrest.ca.

*Next up... Taking Notes and Keeping Them Organized*