Guide to Searching Library Resources: Tools, Strategies & Techniques

I. Accessing Library Resources & Search Tools

1) Login:
A login is required for remote (off-campus) access to LLC e-resources. The login is automatically set to the following for all faculty, staff and students:

**Username:** Student or employee ID number preceded by “BVC,” i.e. BVC12345
**Password:** Last four digits of your phone number (may be home or office)

For login help, contact a library assistant at the circulation desk, by phone at 403-410-1647, or email at circulation@bowvalleycollege.ca

2) Barcode & Borrowing Privileges:
To borrow physical materials, bring your employee ID to the circulation desk in the LLC to obtain a barcode that serves as a library card. LLC cardholders may also borrow materials directly from the University of Calgary libraries, St. Mary’s University College, and Ambrose University College

3) Interlibrary Loan (ILL):
The LLC’s ILL services allow students, staff, and faculty of Bow Valley College to request resources not available in our physical or digital collections from other libraries. Further details and forms to submit requests for books and articles are available in the “Services” section of the LLC website.

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<tr>
<th>Content/Purpose</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
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<td><strong>Databases</strong></td>
<td>Various facets are built into database interfaces for adjusting search results.</td>
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<td>(LLC website, under e-resources)</td>
<td>These typically include:</td>
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<td>Provides access to electronic resources, the format and subject area depending on the particular focus of the subject area.</td>
<td>• Options to search by keyword, field (i.e. title, author, abstract, etc.) or subject</td>
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<td>In general, there are two types:</td>
<td>• Options to limit results by publication date, format, language, geography, subject, etc.</td>
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<td>• Subject-specific (i.e. PsycINFO for psychology)</td>
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<td>• Format-specific (i.e. Films on Demand, Canadian Newsstand)</td>
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| **Discovery Service Catalogue** | The catalogue interface provides options to search and/or limit results by the parameters described above. |
| (main page of LLC website) | Users can also: |
| Provides access and details about all available resources, with the exception of streaming videos (print materials, DVDs, ebooks, images, and periodical articles) | • Check the location of items in the print or electronic collections of the LLC |
| Searches bibliographic indexes, which allow users to discover content not immediately accessible through the LLC | • Place holds on checked out items |
| Retrieves scholarly content available on the internet, such as open access journals | • Save, print or email search results |
| | • View bibliographic details for items not immediately accessible to BVC users |
The Alberta Library (TAL) catalogue (http://talonline.ca/)

TAL is a consortium of public, academic, and special libraries in Alberta that provide reciprocal borrowing privileges allowing users to borrow up to 5 items from any library in Alberta. TAL Online is a union catalogue that includes over 16 million books, CDs, DVDs, and full-text articles owned or licensed by Alberta's libraries.

Use TAL Online to:

• Search holdings of 300 Alberta libraries, 20,000 worldwide libraries and free online resources such as Project Gutenberg and HathiTrust
• Use more than 10 languages to find material available in almost 500 languages
• If a member of the public library, submit and check the status of interlibrary loan (ILL) requests

II. Search Strategies

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<th>Type</th>
<th>Key Advantages &amp; Disadvantages</th>
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<td>1) <strong>Keyword</strong> searching refers to using natural language to describe your topic. The library catalogue or database will look for keywords anywhere in the record for the resource (i.e. title, author, abstract, subject headings, full-text, etc.)</td>
<td>• More flexible for searching, as terms can be combined in any number of ways • Since indexing terms may take several years to evolve, it is ideal for finding very specific or new concepts and terminology • Provides the broadest amount of results, which may yield irrelevant results or “false drops”</td>
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| 2) **Controlled vocabulary** refers to pre-defined words assigned to describe and classify the content of each resource in a library catalogue or database. Most common are **subject headings**, also referred to as descriptors or subject terms, which act as access points to assist users in locating sources. | • Once the correct subject heading for a term has been identified, all resources grouped under it can be quickly and efficiently accessed.  
  o For example, if researching the "death penalty," there’s no need to search for every related term (execution, electrocution, capital punishment, etc.); instead, you can find the subject heading and retrieve all items on the topic with just one search. • Search results will typically be more relevant to your topic and exclude irrelevant hits resulting from words with double meanings (homonyms) • Unique terms (i.e. personal names or brands) and recent developments in a topic may be missed, as they may have not yet been indexed in the database’s controlled vocabulary |
| 3) **Cited reference** searching involves finding sources that have cited a particular author or source. In the LLC’s collection of EBSCOHost databases (such as Academic Search Complete), this function is at the top of the screen under "Cited References." | • Allows you to trace how an influential argument or research findings have been framed and discussed • Useful for finding sources that are out-of-print or otherwise difficult to access • As it is second-hand, requires consideration of how the source is being potentially misrepresented |
4) **Pearl growing** uses the characteristics of a highly relevant and authoritative article, referred to as the "pearl," to search for additional related sources.

**Bibliographic mining** involves reviewing the references at the end of a book, journal article, dissertation or similar work and "mining" it for further resources of interest and relevancy.

Both methods allow a researcher to trace the history and evolution of a topic or area of study. For this reason, it is an excellent technique to use for literature reviews.

1) Find a relevant and authoritative article
2) Locate and open the catalogue/database record for that article
3) Review the subject terms used to index the source; use these as keywords or access points to other resources
4) Review and find the references cited in the source

### III. Search Techniques & Features

**What is it?**

**Limiters**

A limiter reduces the number of search results by retrieving items that contain only the element that you choose.

Options vary according to the type of search tool, but generally include format, subject, language, geographic area, and date of publication.

**How to Use It?**

- Limiters generally appear as check boxes on the side of the search results list
- In the library catalogue, limiters appear in the left-hand column:

  - To remove a library catalogue limiter, click on the x icon at the top of the left-hand column
Fields
A field is a category used to "file" a library resource in the catalogue or database.

Fields vary according to type of search tool or resource, but typically include title, author, publication name, date, and format.

Connectors (Boolean Operators)
The LLC catalogue and databases give users the option to use connecting words, or Boolean operators, to change the way a keyword is matched to the item record.

Connectors help to narrow, expand, and refine search results.

- “AND” retrieves items containing more than one term, decreasing the amount of search results but increasing relevancy.
  - For example, “curriculum AND community college”
- “OR” retrieves items containing one or both terms. Users can expand search results by adding synonyms or related concepts.
  - For example, “physician OR doctor”
- “NOT” will exclude a term from search results, decreasing the amount of results but improving accuracy.
  - For example, “depression NOT economy”

Truncation
Truncation refers to searching by the root of a term in order to broaden your search results by finding the plural or adjectival forms of the term.

Remove the ending of a word and place an asterisk (*) next to the root. For example: "psych*" AND "teen*" will also find results for:
  - "psychology" AND "teens"
  - "psychiatry" AND "teens"
  - "psychology" AND "teenager"
  - "psychiatry" AND "teenager"
  - "psychology" AND "teenagers"

How to know when you’ve exhausted the literature?

In general, you’ll know when you no longer need to continue searching when there is clear chain of evidence from the beginning of formalized research to the most current information available on a topic.

To help determine this, use these questions:

- Did you find the first description of research on your topic? Is this verifiable through secondary sources?
- Do your sources provide a clear chain of evidence demonstrating the accumulation of knowledge on your research topic?
- Do the results of your search continually refer to the same core group of authors and papers? Do they refer to the same person or research group as being the first to identify or describe a particular topic?
- Have you have followed up on relevant references and synonyms that you discover in your searching?
- Did you consult with a professor or expert in the field to ask if they are aware of research you may have missed?
- Have you used multiple search tools, including search engines and subscription databases?