Preparing for your literature review in the Social Sciences

Kat Steiner, Assistant Librarian, Bodleian Education Library
Sarah Wilson, Collections & Instructional Materials Manager, Sainsbury Library, Said Business School

Course PowerPoint + workbook:
Available on the iSkills Libguide @ https://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/workshops/handouts

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the session, you should:

• Understand the literature review process;
• Be able to plan an effective and structured search for your thesis;
• Know where to look for different types of information;
• Have evaluated different methods of searching;
• Have developed search skills that can be applied across different resources;
• Have had a chance to practise;
• Know where to come for future help.

Course structure:

1. The literature review process
2. Searching
3. Search tools
4. Citation searching
5. Alerts

Access to online resources provided by the Bodleian Libraries:

• SOLO http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk
• Databases A-Z https://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/az.php
• Libguides https://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/oxford
• Single Sign On http://help.it.ox.ac.uk/webauth/oxfordusername
Doing the literature review
Key questions and some answers...

1. Why is the literature review important?
   a. To provide a rationale for your research; to justify your research and its value in light
      of what has gone before
   b. To understand your topic, how it has been researched before, and the issues involved
      (look at the journals in your area: the issues, the ‘discourse’ and genre, the
      methodologies used)
   c. To develop a conceptual framework for your own research
   d. To identify gaps in the literature
   e. To help focus your own research question
   f. To develop your own argument

2. Why be methodical?
   a. Gives a true, comprehensive and unbiased picture of previous research
   b. Provides a broad coverage of what IS there and identifies what ISN’T there - gaps
   c. Justifies what you want to include in your review – scope, coverage etc – and what
      you leave out
   d. Transparent and replicable – easy to find material again, can explain what you did to
      your supervisor/examiner
   e. Efficient use of time
   f. Finds a manageable number of relevant results

3. How do you choose your search terms?
   a. Discussions with your supervisor
   b. Subject dictionaries/ thesauri
   c. Initial readings
   d. Subject databases – scope notes, thesauri
   e. Repeat/iterative searching – using subject headings, thesaurus terms
   f. Experimentation – keywords will evolve during review process

4. Where do you plan to search for the literature?
   a. subject-specific databases
   b. interdisciplinary databases
   c. cross-searches of databases
   d. library catalogues
   e. references at the end of articles
   f. hand searches/online browsing of key titles
   g. citation indexes
   h. scholarly search engines, e.g. Google Scholar
   i. general search engines – limit to academic domains
   j. current awareness databases (sign up for alerts)

5. What sources are you trying to find? Includes:
   a. Journal articles (from peer-reviewed journals)
   b. Key books (avoiding secondary references, where possible)
   c. Conference papers/proceedings
   d. Government/academic research reports (check for reputable authors, dates, etc.)
   e. “Grey literature”
   f. The internet (but need to be careful)

Look for: Publications by key scholars and most recent and relevant material in the field
Building a structured search

An example of one possible approach...

| Research Question: What is being done to help prevent AIDS in Zimbabwe? |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Row 1** | Concept 1: Help prevent | Concept 2: AIDS | Concept 3: Zimbabwe |
| **Row 2** | Prevent(ion) Intervention Awareness Educat(ion) | AIDS HIV Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome Human Immunodeficiency Virus | Zimbabwe Southern Africa Sub-Saharan Africa |
| **Row 3** | #1 = prevent* OR interven* OR aware* OR educat* | #2 = aids OR “acquired immune deficiency syndrome” OR hiv OR “human immunodeficiency virus” | #3 = Zimbabwe OR “Southern Africa” OR “Sub-Saharan Africa” |
| #1 AND #2 AND #3 (N.B. # means search number) | #1 AND #2 AND #3 (N.B. # means search number) | #1 AND #2 AND #3 (N.B. # means search number) | #1 AND #2 AND #3 (N.B. # means search number) |
Example Result from IBSS (ProQuest)

The potential for political leadership in HIV/AIDS communication campaigns in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract
The HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a point of important political concern for governments especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Clinical and public health interventions to curb the epidemic can be greatly enhanced with the strategic support of political leaders. We analyzed the role of national political leadership in large-scale HIV/AIDS communications campaigns in 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. We primarily reviewed grey and white literature published from 2005-2014. We further triangulated data from in-person and phone interviews with key public health figures. A number of themes emerged supporting political leaders' efforts toward HIV/AIDS program improvement, including direct involvement of public officials in campaign spear-heading, the acknowledgment of personal relationship to the HIV epidemic, and public testing and disclosure of HIV status. Areas for future improvement were also identified, including the need for more directed messaging, increased transparency both nationally and internationally and the reduction of stigmatizing messaging from leaders. The political system has a large role to play within the healthcare system, particularly for HIV/AIDS. This partnership between politics and the health must continue to strengthen and be leveraged to effect major change in behaviors and attitudes across Sub-Saharan Africa.
Building a structured search – task

Exercise 1
Write your research question (or if you don’t have one, a brief sentence about a research interest) in the top box.

**Row 1.** Identify the key concepts in the research question and write one in each concept box (you may have more, or less, than 3 concepts).

**Row 2.** In the column under each concept brainstorm alternative terms which might be useful (e.g. synonyms, alternative spellings, broader/narrower/related terms.)

Exercise 2

**Row 3:** Decide on your search terms and note down truncation and Boolean operators as appropriate.

**Row 4:** Complete the search strategy by combining your search sets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row 1</th>
<th>Concept 1:</th>
<th>Concept 2:</th>
<th>Concept 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row 3</th>
<th>#1 =</th>
<th>#2 =</th>
<th>#3 =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row 4</th>
<th>#1 AND #2 AND #3 (or as appropriate to your search)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Search Tools & Resources

Major Platforms for social science bibliographic databases include:

**EBSCOhost**
Includes:
- Anthropology Plus
- Business Source Complete
- EBSCOhost eBook collection

**Ovid**
Includes:
- Global Health
- MEDLINE
- PsychInfo

**ProQuest**
Includes:
- Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)
- EconLit
- ERIC (Education)
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- Sociological Abstracts
- Worldwide Political Science Abstracts

**Scopus**

**Web of Science**
Includes:
- Social Science Citation Index
Primary Sources include:

**News**
- Multi-regional / Current
  - Nexis (including BBC Monitoring International Reports)
  - Factiva
- Regional
  - China Core Newspapers Database
  - Ethnic Newswatch (mainly US, ethnic and minority press)
  - Nikkei Telecom21 (Japanese news and finance)
  - Pravda (1912-2009)
  - Russian Central newspapers
  - Times of India archive
  - WiseSearch (China)
- News Archives
  - Foreign Broadcast Information Service (1974-1996)
  - Digital Archives of the Times, Financial Times, The Economist, Daily Mail
  - UK Press Online: Daily Mirror Daily Express

**Data and statistics**
- Multi-regional: UK Data Service International (World Bank / UN / IMF), OECD iLibrary, Emerging Markets Information Service
- Regional: Indiastat, China Data Online, Americas Barometer

**Lists of IGO’s, NGO’s and Institutes (for grey literature):**
- PolicyFILE: research organizations, think tanks, university programmes and NGOs listed:
- CIAO (Columbia International Affairs Online): grey literature from 100s of research institutes
  [http://www.ciaonet.org](http://www.ciaonet.org)

**Theses and dissertations:**
- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
- EThOS (British Library’s electronic thesis delivery service)
- ORA (Oxford University Research Archive)
- SOLO (printed copies held in libraries)

**Conference proceedings & working papers:**
- PapersFirst & Proceedings First
- Web of Science Conference Proceedings Index
- ZETOC
- Working papers generally available on institutional websites or subject based repositories such as REPEC (economics papers) and SSRN.
Citation searching - task
Citation searching allows you to find new and current research based on earlier research as well as giving you an idea of the impact of a particular paper. The following task uses Web of Science.

1. In Databases A-Z search for Web of Science Core Collection, click on More Settings and select the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI).

2. Search Web of Science SSCI using your structured search from before – you can break down the search as you have done for the ProQuest database and then combine your various searches from the search history.
   a. Sort your results by Relevance and pick a number of titles that have been highly cited – you can save them to a Marked List to export later.
   b. Sort your results by Times Cited – highest to lowest and pick a number of titles that look relevant – these can also be saved to a Marked List.

3. Click on the Times Cited number for a title you are interested in. You will see a list of articles that have cited that title – some of which may also be relevant to your research.

4. Return to your search results and click on the title of an article that interests you and then on the first author. You could also perform a search for a particular author from the main search screen.

5. For any number of titles that interest you can set up an email or RSS alert to tell you when they have been cited by a new article.
   a. Click on the title of any article that interests you, then select Create Citation Alert.
   b. Type your email address and choose the format of the email you want and click Create Alert. (You will need to be signed into Web of Science to create an alert. If you don’t have an account you can set one up at the top of the page).
Setting up a search alert - task

ProQuest databases: [http://search.proquest.com/](http://search.proquest.com/)

Once you have found some useful search results, you can set up an alert that will notify you every time new material is added to the database which matches your search criteria.

1. To do this on ProQuest, you first need to have a My Research account, so click on this icon in the top right of the screen.

2. Click on “Sign in to My Research”

3. If you don’t already have a ProQuest My Research Account, scroll down to create one by clicking on [Create a My Research account](#).

4. Fill in the short online form and click to create an account.

5. Then click on [Go to My Research](#).

6. At the top right of the screen, return to your previous search, by clicking on the icon for recent searches:

7. You will see a record of your recent search(es). Hover your mouse over Actions to the right of the search you would like to use for your alert.

8. To set up an email alert, select the option “Create Alert”.

9. Complete the four online steps to set up your alert. ([Note: Step 3] – make sure you select Yes, to include details of the search you used to set up the alert. You may also want to change the default drop down option, to include older documents that are added to the database.)

10. You will now receive email alerts at the frequency you have chosen, listing all new material added to the database.

11. You can also choose to receive your alerts as RSS feeds rather than as emails.
Keeping up to date with journals - task

Information sources are increasingly varied and vast, and monitoring the latest developments is especially challenging for those engaged in interdisciplinary research. Developing a method for keeping up to date with new research is a key step in the research management process.

In this task, you will set up an email alert to get new research to come to you from selected academic journals. This task uses JournalTOCs, a freely-available journal current awareness service providing access to recent tables of contents from over 32,000 scholarly journals.

Set up a journal table of contents alert

1. Open a new tab in your web browser and go to JournalTOCs http://www.journaltocs.ac.uk/.

2. Sign In, or if you do not have an account already, Sign Up for an account.

3. Search for broad keywords relevant to your research and in the results list on the left tick the check boxes of any journal titles you are interested in.

4. At the top of the page, hover over your account name and select Followed Journals. From here you can see the journals you follow.
   - You can now choose whether you wish to receive email alerts when new table of contents are published for your followed journals.
   - Ensure the check box next to Email Alerts is ticked.

2. Other Types of Alerts

It is also possible to set up RSS feeds from many different sources including JournalTOcs (by exporting your Followed Journals), SOLO, saved searches in databases, institutional websites, citation alerts for specific articles and so on. You can set up a feed whenever you see the RSS or logos.

5. Subscribe to an RSS feed for news from the Bodleian Libraries. Feeds can be found on many library websites including:
   - Bodleian Social Science Library: http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ssl
   - SSL Blog: http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ssl
   - Bodleian Law Library: http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/law
   - Bodleian Education Library: http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/education
   - Bodleian Libraries (general): http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/