

Vocabulary: Key to Searching for the Works of Others

Articulate the subject you want to investigate

Does the student-teacher ratio impact student achievement?

Identify the words/phrases that constitute the main topics

Does the *student-teacher ratio* impact *student achievement*?

Consider using two different types of search tools

Traditional academic database
Search using structured vocabulary (thesaurus)
e.g., *ERIC*, *PsycINFO*, *CINAHL*

Discovery database
Search using whatever text is used by item authors
e.g., EMU's *Esearch*, *Google Scholar*

Searching in a traditional academic database: ERIC

- In many traditional academic databases all items are examined by human indexers, who assign subject terms to each item that characterize the content of the item. The subject terms come from a disciplinary thesaurus developed by each database producer.
- In traditional academic databases seek out the subject headings that are used by the database that are synonymous with the topics you are investigating. How?
- Start searching using your own vocabulary for your topics:
“student teacher ratio” AND “student achievement”

- Reviewing the result list and the *ERIC* thesaurus, you see the subject terms used in *ERIC*

teacher student ratio
class size

academic achievement
mathematics achievement
reading achievement
science achievement

- Redo your search combining all the database subject terms you found:

“teacher student ratio” or “class size” AND “academic achievement” or “mathematics achievement”
or “reading achievement” or “science achievement”

Searching in discovery databases: EMU's Esearch and Google Scholar

- The items in discovery databases are not individually examined by humans and no standard vocabulary is applied to describe the contents of the database
- When searching discovery databases, you are responsible for being alert and attentive to the vocabulary used by others to describe the topics you are investigating
- If you started by searching in a traditional academic database, make a list of the database subject vocabulary used to describe your topic, as well as any other synonymous words/phrases you saw being used by the authors of the items in the database results list

teacher student ratio
student teacher ratio
teacher pupil ratio
pupil teacher ratio
class size

academic achievement
student achievement
academic performance
scholastic achievement
mathematics achievement
reading achievement
science achievement

- In the discovery database, pick one word or phrase for EACH of your main topics and type them into the single search box of the discovery tool, one following the other, without any additional punctuation:

teacher student ratio academic achievement

- Review your results

NOTE: If the results do not look very relevant, try putting quotes around each of your topics that is a multi-word phrase, e.g.

“teacher student ratio” “academic achievement”

- If you found enough material to answer your question, you are done
- If you did not find enough, replace one topical word/phrase at a time in the search box and review the result list after each change:

“teacher student ratio” “student achievement”

“teacher student ratio” “academic performance”

“teacher student ratio” “scholastic achievement”

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“class size” “academic achievement”

“class size” “student achievement”

“class size” “academic performance”

“class size” “scholastic achievement”