

Vocabulary: Key to Searching for the Works of Others

Articulate the subject you want to investigate

Does being overweight impact academic performance?

Identify the words/phrases that constitute the main topics

Does being *overweight* impact *academic performance*?

Consider using two different types of search tools

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

- 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:

overweight AND “academic performance”

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

overweight
obesity
body weight

academic achievement
mathematics achievement
reading achievement
science achievement

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

overweight or obesity or “body weight” 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

overweight
obesity

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

- If the discovery database offers an Advanced search screen, as does EMU's *Esearch*, use that screen to enter your search as you would in a traditional academic database [Capitalize the OR connector]
- If you use a discovery database basic single search box, such as in *Google Scholar* or *Google*, follow a different search-term entry strategy: 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:

overweight academic performance

- Review your results
- 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:

overweight scholastic achievement
overweight student achievement
overweight academic achievement

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obesity academic performance
obesity scholastic achievement
obesity student achievement
obesity academic achievement