**Tips on Literature Searching**

**Start early!**

**Background reading**

It’s a very good idea to do some background reading before your search if the subject is unfamiliar to you; this will make you aware of the new ideas and vocabulary. It will make it easier for you when constructing search strategies for database searching.

**Initial searching**

* Be prepared to try out more than one database – don’t use just e.g. ScienceDirect. (only Elsevier journals). You may need to use a combination of databases to achieve optimum results
* Construct your search strategy – identify your key concepts and think of alternatives (e.g. synonyms, broader/narrower terms, singular/plural, UK/US spelling variations). Combine your search terms.
* Look at your search results as to relevance – this will help you to decide how to adjust your search strategy (e.g. change, add, delete search terms) to remove irrelevant items whilst trying to retain the relevant ones
* Register with the database – this will allow you to save your useful search strategies (and come back later to rerun and adapt them) and/or save records.
* Once registered you can also set up alerts to email you any new items matching your search strategy every time the database is updated.

**Too many results from your database search?**

Options:

* Add in extra search terms
* Limit by year/language
* Limit to title (some search terms)
* Limit to index terms (if available)

**Too few results from your database search?**

Options:

* Alternative spellings
* Omit some of your search term (s)
* Search further back
* Try other databases
* Try citation searching

**The art of literature searching**

Literature searching is not an exact science – two people looking for the same topics will have varying search strategies resulting in differing reference lists. But if you follow the leads (see below!) you should end up with a similar list of relevant resources for use in your assignment.

**Follow the leads**

Your initial literature searches are just a starting point. Follow up on papers cited by the documents you initially find; they in turn will lead you to others. As you progress you will find less and less new papers are turning up.

**Other strategies**

Depending on your results there are a number of options to take your search forward; you may choose to use several of these approaches either simultaneously or consecutively:

* From the information you have gained so far you may want to rerun your database search, eg if you now have new/more precise terms (keywords) to describe what you are looking for **OR** you may wish to try a different database
* Citation searching, either backwards (reference lists at the end of papers) or forwards (use Web of Science or Scopus databases)
* Key papers. Often there is a “key paper” that started off a particular research area – try and identify it – hopefully it will become clear (i.e. most of the papers you are finding keep referring to it). Use citation searching to identify related papers
* Key authors – carry out author searches
* Look for general review/literature review type papers to help you. This should not be seen as a quick fix – use the paper/reference lists as a starting point
* Internet searching – this may provide a different sort of information eg company information, grey literature .

**Citing and referencing/Note taking**

* As soon as you start extracting information and making notes from the papers, keep a record of their full bibliographic details. You might like to use reference management software to store and manage your reference details.
* Make it clear in your notes what information has come from what source (use page numbers as well), whether it is information you have paraphrased or if it is a direct quote. Also make it clear what are your own comments (these don’t need to be acknowledged).