APA Citation Practice

Undergraduate Research Methods in Psychology

Quinton Quagliano, M.S., C.S.P   Department of Psychology

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1 Purpose

In this class, we place a heavy emphasis on scholarly, peer-reviewed, published articles as being the gold-standard for evidence in making and defending claims. The natural question that arises from that is: "Then how do we find these articles?" - but like many other parts of the scientific process, the literature search is complicated, and must be done with care.

The primary goal of searching the literature on a certain topic is to gather as many relevant papers as possible to your topic of writing. Then, you later sift through those that you find and only keep those that feel especially necessary to your work. During the journey of a project, you are likely to be routinely adding and subtracting relevant papers from your organization, as you write and read more.

There is no perfect way to search for articles, but there are many resources you can try to use that may guide you to new insights and papers. With the internet, and rise of various search tools, I'd encourage that you try a few different websites and engines to see which produce the most comprehensive results. I place no restriction on what search tools you use, so long as you ensure you are finding peer-reviewed articles.

This reference document will contain some general information and guidance for searching for papers and understanding academic journals - please read through all that is here and watch what is presented in lecture prior to attempting your own search. This is dense, but the process of a good literature needs to be thorough!

2 Description of Academic Journals

2.1 Structure of Academic Journal Publishing

We know we are looking for peer-reviewed journal articles, but what does that mean? Well first we need to understand what an *academic journal* is.

Scientific journals are organized periodicals that contain published research articles. They are usually published at a regular basis (e.g., monthly, quarterly, yearly), but some journals publish articles on a rolling and continuous basis. Journals are also commonly organized into *volumes*, *issues*, and articles (which appear in the reference information of papers!) They tend to be specific to certain topic or domains.

So for example, Journal X may release one volume a year, with a new issue every month, each issue containing 12 total articles. Therefore, there would be 1 volume each year, with 12 issues released, one for each month. Then, each article fall in a certain page range within that issue.

It used to be that articles only became "real" once the issue they were a part of was released and sent to readers and libraries. However, many articles today are published online prior to their actual issue release (and are fine to be cited).

2.2   People and Process in Academic Journals

Academic journals are owned by large publishers which are effectively the financial backing of the operations of publication. While the publisher does technically control the journal, they are often removed from the everyday administration and selection of papers.

All of the scientists, editors, and reviewers involved in a journal are likely people who have published in the same field as the topic of the journal.

The highest scientific power in a journal is/are the *editor(s)-in-chief*: they disseminate tasks and reviews to other editors, and they often determine the direction and goals of a journal. They often hold a sort of authoritative veto power on whether a paper is published or not.

Below editor(s)-in-chiefs may be a system of other ranks of *editors*, some who have more or less responsibility than others. Ultimately, these are who are likely to give the final thumbs-up or down to a paper submitted to publication.

Finally, under the editors are *peer-reviewers*. This is a less formalized position, and more so "as-needed". When editors receive papers submitted for publication they send that article out to reviewers and source their opinions and thoughts on that paper.

So, whether a paper is accepted or not is often determined by the comments and suggestions of reviewers, which are then compiled by an editor, who makes the final decision.

3   Searching for Academic Articles

3.1   Databases and Search Engines

It used to be that the best way to find articles relevant to your own research was to skim through *physical* copies of journal volumes in your topic and try to find relevant sources - back-breaking labor.

Thankfully, now all we have to do is use **scientific databases** that search through numerous journal articles according to our search terms. These databases are like Google, except they only return scientific results (or are supposed to). That way, we can easier find peer-reviewed articles rather than random journalistic pieces or blogs or otherwise.

I'll list several of the databases you should consider using for psychological and social science articles. Note that you may want to try several of these to see if you pick up relevant articles that you otherwise would have missed.

3.1.1   GVSU Library Databases

The GVSU librarians have put together an excellent webpage listing some of the databases that are accessible via your GVSU account. I would strongly suggest you try out some of

these databases first, as they tend to return the most reliable results and often have the full-text readily available. They also have very fine tune control on searching that you can use to get very specific or broad. You can access this webpage here.

Included databases:
- Pyscinfo
- ProQuest Psychology Journals
- PubMed
- Web of Science
- JSTOR
- PsycARTICLES

On the sidebar, there are also links for two databases are particularly tailored to finding psychological measures (hint: this will be helpful later for your homework and research project):
- HAPI (Health and Psychological Instruments)
- Mental Measurements Yearbook with Tests in Print

3.1.2 Google Scholar

Google itself publishes a (supposedly) scientific search tool called Google Scholar, which is separate from a normal Google search. It tends to be a bit spottier in quality, regularly returning less-scientific and non-peer-reviewed sources. I also find that it tends to have repeats more often and struggles with more specific queries. But, it can work for more broad searches, and is useful in snowballing through citations. It also occasionally may have a full-test that other databases don't pick up.

3.1.3 Semantic Scholar

Link to Database - account recommended

I find that this database tends to be more accurate than Google Scholar for search terms, and able to find more papers than some of the GVSU databases. But, it tends to be a bit weaker ithis too¡'n finding full-text PDFs. Still, it is worth trying to search here, in addition to the others, to get some more coverage.

3.1.4 Research Rabbit

Link to Database - account required

This isn't so much a database as it is a tool that links to related papers. However, it possesses a really useful and unique function that can be of great assistance when you feel like you have already found. Basically, you can drop all of your "good" papers into this,

and it will analyze them and try to find any more papers that are related to the ones you already have. This can be of use when you are at the end of your literature search and want to double-check to see if you are missing any that slipped through.

3.1.5   Others?

There are infinitely many databases and search tools for papers, and I couldn't possibly list them all. But, you should play around with the ones above and see if a combination of them helps you find what you are looking for - you likely won't need to use *all* of them.

3.2   Using the Databases / Techniques

Each database comes with it's own unique set of features - some of which you may find helpful in your own work. However, it is beyond my ability to show you *everything* in each database, and it may be wise to experiment a bit with them yourself. I'll preview some basic functions in this document, but you should watch the demonstration video on Blackboard for a better visual.

3.2.1   Automatic References

Many databases have some feature that allows you to automatically create an APA 7 style reference for a paper you found on there, which can mean avoiding having to write it out by hand! **But, this function is imperfect and may be slightly incorrect - you should always double-check its accuracy!**

3.2.2   Forward and Backwards Searching

When you find a paper that is interesting and relevant to what you are looking for, you likely want to look both at what paper that one cited (backwards), as well as what papers cited the one you are currently looking at (forwards)! Databases may have two separate buttons that you can use for these techniques to snowball into finding other relevant papers.

3.2.3   Full-text PDFs

Article abstracts are usually public, but the full-text of the study may be locked behind a paywall. If you are using the GVSU-provided databases, you may already have access, and some papers found on Google Scholar and others may also be accessible. You will have the most luck finding full-text PDFs on places like PsycInfo. As a last resort, you may request an inter-library loan to access it or email the author asking for a copy.

3.2.4   Keyword Searching / Thesaurus

In databases, you don't need to use full sentences like you would in a normal search engine, e.g., "paper that contains topics like depression and anxiety" - instead, you could just search for "depression AND anxiety". But, some papers may not use the same words that you think to search for, trying looking for synonyms in the built-in thesaurus to also insert for a better chance of finding all of the paper.

3.3   Organizing References

As you read more and find more new papers, you are likely to run into the issue of how exactly to organize all of these PDFs and references. Different people have different strategies for this process, but I'll list a few here.
- Create a folder just for your references PDFs and dump all of them in there
- Make a Word document and copy-paste the reference info for each paper
- Use a citation manager like Zotero or Mendeley

I personally use Zotero, and find that it does good enough in managing my citations, and is free. You are free to try some different ways of handling this, but you probably will have to come up with *some* way to manage all of these.

4   Other Resources

Outside of this document, there are many great, informative resources to use as you navigate searching for documents. Paramount of these is GVSU's Knowledge Market and the Library Research Center. Many of our fantastic librarian know more than me about how to look for scholarly work, and are sure to have excellent tips, go talk to them!